



May 7, 2025

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, and seeks to create policies which allow all Mainers to live free from gender-based discrimination and violence. That is why we oppose all bills presented this morning which would limit young people's ability to fully participate in their schools and communities in accordance with their gender: LD 233; LD 868; LD 1002; LD 1134; and LD 1704.

**Our work to expand gender equity is rooted in the idea that harmful norms around gender identity and presentation are used to marginalize, compartmentalize, and sideline members of our community.** These bills purport to protect women and girls by excluding transgender girls and young women from sports and school spaces – but fall far short of addressing the challenges girls and women actually face.

**The enforcement of proposed bans is invasive, inappropriate and harmful.** It's important to consider how a school would be responsible for enforcing these proposed bans: whether it's a blood or a DNA test, or child being forced to undergo a genital exam, any type of "sex verification testing"<sup>1</sup> on a child is a disturbing and deeply inappropriate violation of privacy, and has the potential for rampant sexual abuse for all girls. Lest you think that these are hyperbole, each of them have real-life examples, from Annet Negesa to Ilona Maher.

**Not only do these requirements foster an increased focus and attention on monitoring the bodies and presentations of all young people, they fail to acknowledge the real struggles of youth,** not just in a few selected communities or with a couple of athletes, but pervasive and relentless harm. The Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey tells us that girls in Maine are more likely to experience sexual harassment and violence and to have serious mental health needs<sup>2</sup> than their male counterparts in every county in Maine. Girls under 18 are among the highest risk populations for experiencing abuse and violence, often at the hands of trusted adults in their lives. And while sports is intended to be a pathway to leadership and teamwork, nearly 21 per cent of professional women athletes

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2020). They're Chasing Us Away from Sport. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/12/04/theyre-chasing-us-away-sport/human-rights-violations-sex-testing-elite-women>

<sup>2</sup> Maine CDC. (2023). Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey. Retrieved from <https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/2023-results>



have experienced sexual abuse as a child in sport – almost double the rate of male athletes at 11 per cent.<sup>3</sup>

Sports are an opportunity for young people to build connections and a sense of belonging. **For girls especially, who are more likely to experience mental health challenges or to struggle with body image, team sports can be a confidence builder and a refuge.** A blanket exclusion would keep trans girls out and to deny them these experiences, further marginalizing these community members, and teaching their peers that exclusion is acceptable. This is not in keeping with the values of youth sports. Discrimination based on gender also goes against the spirit of Title IX, which has protected the right of equal access to the benefits of education and sports since 1972.

**This legislative push is so disappointing because it is not about solving a local problem or addressing harm that real Mainers are experiencing. It is part of a national trend to promote trans-hostile legislation as a wedge issue.** While we debate bills without a real connection to what Mainers are experiencing, young people of every gender identity need to hear from adults that they are valued, and we need to focus our energy on supporting youth, not creating false divisions and distractions.

**As an organization which works to celebrate and expand gender equity, we know that we can build a more equitable future for women and girls by ensuring that all women and girls - including trans women and girls - are part of the team.**

We hope you will vote Ought Not to Pass.

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director  
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<sup>3</sup> UN Women. (2024). Tackling violence against women in sport. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/07/tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-sport-a-handbook-for-policy-makers-and-sports-practitioners>