

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Jessi Holleran (they/he.) I'm a resident of Lewiston, and I am here on behalf of EqualityMaine. I am here today in opposition of the bills before the committee today; LD 233, LD 868, LD 1002, LD 1134, LD 1704.

I always knew I was different from other people assigned female at birth. From a young age, it was obvious to many that I had similarities with boys and girls but didn't fit clearly into either category. In elementary school, I was asked by kids on the playground if I was a boy or a girl, and I'd always say, "I'm just me." That was good enough for my classmates - they just wanted someone to play tag with.

Being someone who naturally exists outside of the gender binary has always presented challenges, mostly from adults in my life whose vision of possibility had narrowed since the years of their playground days and who had passed along their harmful beliefs to children. In middle school around the age of 11, I was harassed by teachers and students alike, and was even assaulted in class by a classmate. My teacher did nothing. Karate was an outlet for me, and because of its co-ed nature, it felt like a perfect fit. I could spar in tournaments against boys and girls, and my helmet gave me some semblance of uniformity and anonymity. Unfortunately, when I turned 12, boys I sparred with ostracized me because they didn't enjoy getting their butts kicked by "a girl." I lost the only safe space I had to release my frustration. As a result, I quit karate after 8 years, only one level away from a black belt.

When I was 12, I became suicidal. Ultimately, I was medicated and have been on antidepressants ever since. Let me be clear: I'm not depressed because of being trans and nonbinary. I'm depressed because society harasses and strips away the rights and dignity of people like me. Being pushed to the margins of society is an isolating and alienating experience.

Unfortunately this story is all too common: last year in Maine alone, 38% of LGBTQ+ students seriously considered suicide, and 42% of trans and nonbinary youth considered suicide in Maine last year¹. This legislation would hurt kids like me and even give adults even more of an excuse to bully and abuse the children they are supposed to be teaching, coaching, and protecting. I urge you: let kids be kids. Let kids play sports. Let schools be supportive environments where kids can learn and explore themselves safely. Let's build a world where everyone has more compassion for themselves and each other and less shame and fear of differences.

Maine has always led the way in LGBTQ+ rights. Let's show the rest of the nation that we will still lead the nation in trans rights. Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on these bills. Thank you!

¹ Nath, R., Matthews, D., Hobaica, S., Eden, T.M., Taylor, A.B., DeChants, J.P., Suffredini, K. (2025). 2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People by State. West Hollywood, CA: The Trevor Project. www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024-by-state/. doi: 10.70226/LDYM4046