

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

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony in opposition to LDs 233, 868, 1134, and 1337. I am a cisgender woman from Portland. I am writing to share my personal story of participating in girls' and women's sports, and why I believe all girls—including transgender girls—should get a chance to have the same positive experiences.

Growing up, I was a swimmer and a cross-country runner. In both sports, I was good, but not the best. Sometimes I made the podium, and occasionally I even won races. But more often I didn't, especially at the larger meets with competitors from all over the state or region. Of course, I was always competing and striving to do better. But mostly, I was not there to win. I was there because sports were my sanctuary.

For all kids, growing up is hard. Your life is run by adults telling you where to go and how to act. Your friendships, your surroundings, and even your body are constantly changing. You don't have much say. And if you are an LGBTQ+ person like me, you might struggle with feeling like you don't belong.

But at practice, all that falls away. You learn how to move your body in new ways. You tap into the rhythm of your breath. You feel your heart rate rise and fall as you change your effort. In this place, like no other place in life, you get to be in control.

That has stayed with me in the years since I stopped competing. When I have faced challenges or felt unsteady in adulthood, I have returned to running and swimming again and again. I am so grateful that I learned to ground myself through these sports at a young age. I would not have learned that skill any other way.

I can't pretend to know how I would have felt as a young person about bills to ban transgender girls from sports. I did not know any transgender girls when I was growing up. Maybe I would have instinctively supported bans based on an incorrect assumption that transgender girls had an unfair advantage over me.

I hope I would have taken the opportunity to learn that being transgender is not a proxy for athletic ability. I hope I would have realized that bills to ban transgender girls from sports would make it everyone's business to question my sex for any reason—my hairstyle, my muscles, my body hair, my voice, or any other part of my child self that was not like other girls.

But above all, I hope I would have come to understand what is so clear to me now: Sports can and should be a safe place for kids to go when other spaces feel unwelcoming. They can and should be a place to find meaning when everything else feels out of control. Every

kid should get the same chance to experience that—especially transgender kids, who are more likely to face discrimination and harassment just for being themselves. Excluding transgender girls from this opportunity would be harmful and wrong. I urge the Committee to vote “ought not to pass” on LDs 233, 868, 1134, and 1337.

Sincerely,

Sarah Austin

Portland, Maine