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May 12, 2023

*Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher presenting*  
**LD 1735, An Act to Safeguard Gender-affirming Health Care**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary*

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and esteemed colleagues of the Judiciary Committee, I am Laurie Osher and I represent District 25, the majority of Orono. Thank you for the opportunity to present **LD 1735, An Act to Safeguard Gender-affirming Health Care**, known as the “Shield Bill.”

At its heart, LD 1735 is about protecting the wellbeing and medical privacy of young people and their families. Right now, while other states are actively criminalizing safe, medically necessary health care, the stakes are higher than ever.

Gender-affirming health care saves lives. Research shows that access to gender-affirming care greatly improves mental health outcomes for transgender youth,<sup>1</sup> lowering rates of depression, anxiety, gender dysphoria, self-harm and suicidality and improving measures of resilience and well-being.<sup>2</sup>

The research is so clear that every major medical organization - including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association, among many others<sup>3</sup> - supports providing age-appropriate gender-affirming care for transgender and nonbinary young people. Our medical professionals know that access to gender-affirming care is essential for those who need it, and they also know that there are strong, evidence-based standards of care.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the medical consensus, there is a coordinated national attack on gender-affirming care,<sup>5</sup> turning what should be private medical decisions involving a patient, their family and their doctors into a political football used to divide communities. As a result, almost a third of transgender youth between the ages of 13 and 17 live in states that have passed bans on gender-affirming care. An additional

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/gender-affirmative-care>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hrc.org/resources/get-the-facts-on-gender-affirming-care>

<sup>3</sup> <https://transhealthproject.org/resources/medical-organization-statements/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hrc.org/resources/get-the-facts-on-gender-affirming-care>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.hrc.org/resources/attacks-on-gender-affirming-care-by-state-map>

17.2% live in states that are considering policies to restrict or ban gender-affirming care.<sup>6</sup> For the families affected, these policies are harmful and cruel.

At least twelve states have already responded by enacting legal protections for those who provide this important care and for those who seek it.<sup>7</sup> Just this week in Vermont, Republican Governor Phil Scott signed additional protections into law.<sup>8</sup>

In a statement on signing that bill, Governor Scott said that the people of Vermont stand for privacy, personal autonomy, and that medical providers should be free to practice without fear.<sup>9</sup> I believe that's true of Mainers, too.

LD 1735 seeks to protect Maine's medical professionals who provide gender-affirming care and the people they treat here in our state. Our goal is to make it clear that Maine law shields them from prosecution by other states, protects their privacy and personal information, and preserves access to this critically important medical care for adults and youth alike.

We are working with stakeholders and the Office of the Attorney General to finalize amendment language, and I respectfully request the committee consider carrying this measure over to allow sufficient time for that work.

For transgender and non-binary young people, the most important thing the adults in their lives can do is to be supportive. They are looking to us - leaders in their communities and in their state - to understand whether they are valued, accepted, and safe. Here is what I would like to say directly to those young people: You matter. You are valued for the person you truly are - your authentic self. We will fight for you, to keep you safe and to make sure you have the care and support you need to thrive.

To members of the committee: Maine has a long tradition of promoting equality and inclusion, and we continue to be a national leader when it comes to enacting policies that protect and affirm our LGBTQ+ communities. Maine voters and the representatives they elect have repeatedly chosen equality in marriage, with protections from discrimination and violence, and in gender equality. I am so proud of this tradition, which is one of the many reasons I am so grateful to call this place my home. Now is the time to choose equality and inclusion once again by enacting the crucial protections we are proposing.

Thank you for your consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.hrc.org/resources/attacks-on-gender-affirming-care-by-state-map>

<sup>7</sup> [www.npr.org/2023/04/21/1171069066/states-protect-transgender-affirming-care-minnesota-colorado-maryland-illinois](https://www.npr.org/2023/04/21/1171069066/states-protect-transgender-affirming-care-minnesota-colorado-maryland-illinois)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.wamc.org/news/2023-05-10/vermont-governor-signs-health-care-shield-bill>

<sup>9</sup> <https://governor.vermont.gov/press-release/action-taken-governor-phil-scott-legislation-may-10-2023>