

Good afternoon, chairpersons Carney and Moonen, and all members of the Judiciary committee My name is Josie Phillips, and I am testifying today as a resident of Lewiston in favor of LD 1735

My testimony today is painful for me I don't like talking about my personal life at work But I feel compelled to share a few things about me today, in light of this bill, and the bills being passed in state houses across the country

The first piece of context about me is that I'm transgender, in that I was born male and raised to be a man But despite everyone's best efforts, well, it didn't really stick I started my transition while attending college in Oklahoma and moved here from Oklahoma last year for my job Oklahoma is one of the many states pursuing a slate of anti-transgender legislation that would make life virtually impossible for people like me

One Oklahoma bill in particular stands out from the rest, HB 2177,<sup>1</sup> which passed through the state house of representatives in February This bill would explicitly ban best practice, medically necessary gender affirming care for minors, and would effectively prohibit this care for adults, too, by preventing any care provider receiving public funding from providing gender affirming care Any doctor who accepts Medicaid patients, for instance, could be barred from treating transgender patients, under this bill

If this bill had been in effect when I was first starting my transition, I wouldn't be alive today That is a deeply strange and uncomfortable thing to say in a room full of strangers, but it's the truth And it's not just my truth, it's the truth for many transgender people Before I began my transition, I was miserable I had been experiencing depression since childhood, and my dysphoria—my sense of discomfort and disconnect from my body—was steadily increasing with each passing year Despite many attempts to suppress or deny it, I realized that I needed to transition, and I was fully prepared to die if I couldn't Luckily, I was able to receive gender affirming care through my university's clinic I was finally able to feel comfortable in my own skin and in my interactions with other people I was finally able to begin building a life worth living for myself, and in doing so, I have known joy that I never could have dreamed was possible

This joy, this inner peace, is what state legislatures across the country are trying to strip transgender people of This is what states are trying to criminalize parents for providing to their children, and doctors for providing to their patients, despite these bans being opposed by an overwhelming majority of medical associations<sup>2</sup> Politicians and activists in these states are attempting to deny transgender people our right to live They are attempting to investigate our parents under fabricated claims of child

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<sup>1</sup> Oklahoma State Legislature, HB 2177 <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=HB2177&Session=2300>

<sup>2</sup> GLAAD, "Medical Association Statements Supporting Trans Youth Healthcare and Against Discriminatory Bills"

<https://www.glaad.org/blog/medical-association-statements-supporting-trans-youth-healthcare-and-against-discriminatory>

abuse and remove children from loving homes <sup>3</sup> They are calling us demons <sup>4</sup> They are trying to brand us as pedophiles <sup>5</sup> They are even, in some cases, outright calling for our elimination <sup>6</sup> These politicians are grotesquely capitalizing on their constituents' fear of what they do not understand for their own political gain,<sup>7</sup> and in doing so, they are creating an atmosphere of terror for some of their states' most vulnerable residents

This political hostility bleeds into the social environment, as well. Nationally, armed militias, including self-described Christian Fascists,<sup>8</sup> have been disrupting Pride celebrations and other community events <sup>9</sup> There was a mass shooting in a queer club in Colorado <sup>10</sup> And in Tulsa, where I lived for a year, a donut shop that hosted a drag event was repeatedly vandalized, the second time by throwing a molotov cocktail through their front window <sup>11</sup>

All this makes me feel unshakably afraid, for my future in this country and for the lives of my friends in states trying to criminalize care. My friends back in Oklahoma are scrambling to get out, in some cases leaving the only homes they've ever known. They're afraid of leaving, but they're even more afraid to stay.

LD 1735 would extend a lifeline to the people currently living under threat of these attempts at fear mongering and elimination. The bill would protect Maine doctors who provide gender affirming care and make Maine a safe harbor to the parents of transgender children, parents who are just trying to provide their children the medical care they need to survive. LD 1735 would also send a message that in Maine, we don't make life harder for our most vulnerable residents, and neither do we punish our medical professionals for providing high quality care to their patients. Passing this bill would mean barely any difference to the lives of most current Mainers, but it would mean everything to the people it protects. Because of this, I implore you to pass LD 1735.

For more information, you can find a list of anti-transgender bills, including gender affirming care bans, across the country at <https://www.tracktranslegislation.com/>

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<sup>3</sup> Texas Tribune, "Texas' child welfare agency blocked from investigating many more parents of trans teens" <https://www.texastribune.org/2022/09/16/texas-trans-teens-investigation-child-abuse/>

<sup>4</sup> Politico, "Florida Republican apologizes after calling transgender people 'mutants'" <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/04/10/florida-republican-apology-transgender-comments-00091315>

<sup>5</sup> NPR, "Accusations of 'grooming' are the latest political attack — with homophobic origins" <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/11/1096623939/accusations-grooming-political-attack-homophobic-origins>

<sup>6</sup> The Federalist, "Michael Knowles Is Right: Transgenderism Needs To Be Eradicated" <https://thefederalist.com/2023/03/06/michael-knowles-is-right-transgenderism-needs-to-be-eradicated/>

<sup>7</sup> NY Times, "How a Campaign Against Transgender Rights Mobilized Conservatives" <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/16/us/politics/transgender-conservative-campaign.html>

<sup>8</sup> Pink News, "Far-right 'Christian fascists' launch chilling, hateful attack on family-friendly drag show" <https://www.thepinknews.com/2022/06/08/christian-fascists-drag-show-texas/>

<sup>9</sup> NPR, "31 members of the white nationalist Patriot Front arrested near an Idaho Pride event" <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/11/1104405804/patriot-front-white-supremacist-arrested-near-idaho-pride>

<sup>10</sup> ABC News, "Police: Gunman kills 5 at gay club, is subdued by patrons" <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/police-dead-18-injured-colorado-nightclub-shooting-93659717>

<sup>11</sup> The Washington Post, "Doughnut shop hit with a molotov cocktail after drag-queen art show" <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/11/04/donut-hole-molotov-cocktail-drag/>