

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Legislative Health coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee.

I am Wendy Merrill from Benton, and I am here to adamantly testify against LD 227.

There is so much wrong with this bill. I would argue there is absolutely NOTHING right about it. It would diminish a woman's reproductive rights by gagging pregnancy centers from sharing truthful information so women can make an informed decision. Pregnancy centers are one of the only places left where women can gather info on all their options without pressure. Although this is an extremely important point, it's not the one I'm going to focus on.

The wording of this bill displays the assumption that 'professionals' like teachers, coaches, counselors, etc. are all honest, trustworthy, upstanding citizens who look out for the best interest of the people they are supposed to serve. This is not true. When I was in jr high, I was sought out and groomed by a teacher and coach who is a sexual predator. I endured the sexual abuse for 2 years as I didn't have the skills or know-how to avoid and stop it. Filled with guilt and shame, I didn't dare tell anyone. Multiple times, this teacher tried to convince me that I was somebody I was not. Thank God I didn't accept that description. Many of the victims did. This person is still teaching today. At the time, I didn't know the signs of a predator. Today I do and I can spot them almost immediately. The passage of this bill would give a green light to predators.

Lies spoken, manipulation, buying things to gain loyalty, purposeful wedges driven between parents and children, would all be considered a legal protected right with zero legal recourse for

the victim and their parents. The passage of this bill would cause law abiding citizens to become criminals (because parents WILL protect their children) and it would cause criminals to be considered law abiding citizens by the State of Maine.

I urge you to vote, ought not to pass.