

Good morning/afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Soren Stark-Chessa and I live in Falmouth. I am a transgender high school junior, here to speak against all the bills that are being considered today by the Judiciary Committee.

Sports are very important to me and to my whole family; I grew up watching my older brothers do sports, and as a kid I wanted nothing more than to be like them.

Yet my experience was not like theirs, at least not at first. I saw that both my brothers found so much joy in the comradery and spirit of sports, but I wasn't able to find these things, and I didn't know why. I liked my teammates when I competed on the boys team; these kids were (and still are) my friends and my classmates. The issue holding me back was that I wasn't existing openly, and this made it impossible for me to feel truly connected to the kids that I competed with or to form real bonds with them. At this time in my life, sports served as an outlet for bettering my physical health, and sometimes coping with stress. But it felt two-dimensional; very black and white.

When I realized I was trans and began running on the girls team, my perspective underwent a huge shift. Now I wasn't just competing as a way to manage stress, I was being open about who I was and I was able to form connections and bonds through this wonderful activity. I got to finally see the amazing feeling of shared experience and working together as a team. I got to feel truly connected to my teammates and competitors. Genuine connection with those in the running community allowed me to realize the true value of sports: to do something together and achieve something together. In short, my world went from black and white, to vibrant color when I was able to exist as my true self.

I get to experience so many amazing things by being able to compete as who I am. Sports are so important to me, as they are to so many other people, and the only way I was able to see that was by being able to exist as my true self. Being my true self brought me closer together with those around me, and everyone showed me all the love in our community. It was these qualities that my brothers experienced every time they went to practice, competed, worked hard and persevered in their sports, and interacted with their teammates and friends. These experiences gave them so much joy, and now that I compete as my true self as well, it's finally mine too.

Trans children are an extremely vulnerable demographic, and running has been extremely important in helping me find a way through hardship. I hope you all will see the value in continuing to make that possible for me, and all others.

Please vote "ought not to pass" on all the bills you are considering today. Thank you.