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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. My name is Christine Caulfield, I'm from Yarmouth, and I'm here on behalf of EqualityMaine and Mainetransnet. I am here in opposition to the bills before the committee today. I'm here today to stand up for a small minority of kids who have become national targets for reasons of political power. These are kids. Specifically, these bills are the first hurdle the right-wing needs to clear in order to advance the next set of proposals to, literally, erase transpeople. If any of my references seem extreme, I'd remind anyone thinking so to look at what else is going on in this country. Just attacks on veterans' health care and children's cancer programs should be enough to elicit questions, if not outrage. So, when the backers of these bills want to ban trans-athletes, I ask, "So, you'd be supportive of gender-affirming care so that trans-kids don't have a so-called biological advantage," and the reply is, "No, we don't think kids should be subjected to medical treatments that are questionable," and my reply is, "So, then you support the need for more research," and the reply is to cut the funding. Clearly, this is about much more than kids and sports.

To the point though, trans-kids are kids. All kids, not just some kids, deserve the benefits of an educational experience, including athletics, that should not include being harassed, taunted, pushed and tripped in the hallways, being called homophobic and transphobic slurs, and being physically attacked. It seems to me odd, that protections for trans kids passed twenty years ago are now being called into question. When the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed same-sex marriage in 2015, the right-wing cast about looking for a new political target, and found trans people, a very small, already marginalized population. Their momentum to use us as a political punching bag has reached terrifying momentum. And here we are, because the narrative that's being pushed is simplistic, and many people buy into it because of its simplicity, regardless of its accuracy, specifically, that people assigned male at birth are inherently stronger than those assigned female at birth and there should be a blanket ban based on that idea. That statement is partly true, which is what gives the best propaganda its effectiveness. But, I coached for sixteen of the twenty-plus years I was a middle and high school teacher, both boys and girls and probably transkids, but that was their business. I do know there are rules and a process that have worked, not only for transkids, but also for any kids who may not fit traditional gender stereotypes. This process works, and has worked for twenty years, and it hasn't been an issue, until this administration took office. The right-wing needed a trans kid to win something, to turn this into an issue, because just participating hasn't been an issue. Apparently, we're not supposed to win. What a terrible message for any kid in any school activity: don't excel.

I also happened to have been a track coach for four years, and I coached the pole vault, the event that is the center of all this national attention. I will not judge the girl who took second place, and her feelings about what happened. They are valid feelings of disappointment. 10' is a good jump, but 10'6", was the winning jump **THAT PARTICULAR DAY IN THAT PARTICULAR MEET**. The nature of competition takes into account many factors. For example, all athletes have good, average, and off days. That's an additional factor that's always present. 10', or 10'6", by national standards is good, but not superlative, it's above average. The state record is 12'. The national record is 15'3". If either of those young vaulters is hoping to perhaps go on to vault in college, teams don't care much about whether you placed 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> in such and such a meet; they are looking at the height you achieved to see if there's more potential. Strength is just one of the many factors in success in pole vaulting, the opposite of what the right-wing wants you to believe. The most important factors are body awareness, focus, and technique. I

coached freshman girls who barely weighed 100 pounds who could outjump much larger, stronger junior boys, because they figured out the technique. Pole vaulting is also the most dangerous event in track, and it takes a lot of courage to do it. It has the potential for more serious injuries than any other event. You have to have technique and control to not just to succeed, but to avoid injury. Courage, control, technique, focus, body awareness are equally valid factors along with strength, and there are other impacts on athletic outcomes. Athletic success isn't determined by gender. These are human attributes, and vary enormously regardless of sex assigned at birth. I am reminded of a girl wrestler who competed in boy's matches and won a championship. That wasn't strength alone, but incredible training, grit, skills, body awareness, well, a wrestler could explain it better. Expanding their claims, these bills purport that girls are somehow in physical danger, an old, worn out but gut-effective ploy that isn't relevant because in twenty years, it hasn't happened. I was also a high school soccer referee, and red-carded kids who intentionally injured other players, often with encouragement from parents and friends on the sidelines, and I was booed for stopping it. Those weren't trans kids getting red-carded. The problems in school sports are too numerous to detail here, but they don't involve trans kids. Pointing to a monster in the closet that isn't there to drum up unjustified fears is a tactic. Trans kids aren't indulging in wanton violence on the field; they're the targets of it.

Considering my focus has been pole-vaulting, by extension, we should all be thinking about raising the bar of public discourse, and not allowing right-wing conspiracy simplistic narratives to define our conclusions. Maine schools have been figuring out trans and gender-diverse participation for twenty years and it's mostly worked, and the process has supported kids who are already struggling with things other kids do not have to contend with. If it can be improved, do that, but avoid blanket bans. Why adults are bullying them, and why we are allowing that, is beyond me. Lastly, I shudder to think what will happen if you don't affirm trans kids participating in school sports. With regular stories in newspapers and other media on the hazing scandals in Brunswick, Bath, Lisbon, and Topsham, and lately in New York, where kids were attacked, urinated on, dry-humped nude in showers, and subjected to homophobic vitriol, how do you think that's going to go for a kid who is transitioning? This is what's happening now if you're even perceived as gay! Those are real dangers, not conjured-up fiction. We are dealing with an utter failure not of schools or sports programs, but by the emboldening of a toxic culture by a corrupt presidential administration that ultimately harms all kids, and which would increasingly endanger every queer kid in Maine schools. Deciding not to affirm trans kids' participation in sports will only make worse of what is already an enormous problem, bullying and hatred in our schools based on sex and gender differences, which is almost always a result of parental influences and support. I taught a workshop three weeks ago in a very small Maine town on gender affirming care. About twenty people showed up, and they were genuinely interested in the science, the medicine, and the issues. Near the close of the evening, a woman raised her hand, and said the following: "I don't know why all this hatred is happening. We live in a small town. Some of us are very different from each other, in lots of ways. But, we have to live together, in a small town, so we've learned how to do that." There is wisdom. We should all be thinking about our state's current climate, and strive to return to a civil life of mutual respect about our differences that figures out how to include all Mainers. Things are not getting worse because trans kids are playing or even winning at sports. Hatred and bias want a foothold to gain political power; that's the real danger.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspectives. I urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on these bills. Thank you.