

Cassie Cooper
Naples, Maine
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Testimony Opposing LD 233, LD 868, LD 1002, LD 1134, LD 1704

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Cassie Cooper. I am a resident of Naples, Maine and the Associate Director of OUT Maine where our mission is to create more welcoming and affirming communities for Maine's diverse queer youth in all of their intersectional identities. For the well being of all Maine youth and families, I implore you to strongly oppose all of the anti-trans bills proposed today.

I've devoted my personal and professional life to supporting youth and educators. I am a youth choir director at a local church, I serve on the Executive Board for the Maine Music Educators Association, and I was previously a Maine public school music teacher. Over the course of my career, I have taught over 2,000 students to express themselves through music, to embrace challenges, and most importantly, to listen to each other. And I ask you to please listen now.

In my 10 years of experience in schools, I witnessed the life-saving impact that affirming school communities have for youth. These dangerous bills send the message that transgender and non-binary youth do not belong in our communities. Transgender and Non-binary youth who have their pronouns and names respected by all or most of the adults in their lives attempt suicide at half the rate (Trevor Project, 2021). But in 2023, over 4,000 LGBTQ+ Maine youth seriously considered suicide. That's enough to fill 100 school buses (Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey, 2023). Let me be clear, this is unacceptable and a direct reflection of the dangerous policies being discussed today.

As a teacher, I have seen first hand how the exclusionary speech and attitudes of adults trickle down to our youngest community members. LGBTQIA+ youth already experience higher rates of violence and bullying in Maine schools (MIYHS, 2023), and these bills will only make school climates worse.

In a time where transgender and non-binary youth are seen and used as political pawns, I ask you to affirm them as constituents, as Mainers, and as humans.

Please oppose each bill proposed today.

Thank you.