



## **Committee on the Judiciary**

LD 233, LD 868, LD 1002, LD 1134, LD 1704

By Gia Drew on behalf of EqualityMaine

May 8, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Gia Drew, and I am the Executive Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ population for more than forty years. EqualityMaine, originally known as the Maine Lesbian Gay Political Alliance (MLGPA), was formed in the aftermath of a horrific tragedy, the death of a young man named Charlie Howard, who was killed for being gay, on a warm July evening in Bangor, during the summer of 1984.

In those forty years, our proud and beautiful community, which lives, works, and dies, in virtually every town in Maine, has become a more visible and important part of the fabric that makes Maine such a special place that we all call home. Because of grassroots efforts, door to door conversations, phone calls, steadfast advocacy, education, and increased visibility, Mainers now see and know LGBTQ+ people as trusted family members, neighbors, friends, co-workers, peers, classmates, teammates, political leaders, community partners, fellow congregants, and so much more.

For additional context, I'm also a former high school teacher and athletic coach, with twenty years experience working with students, athletes, coaches, parents, communities and organizations that support young people and their intrinsic value to society. For the past 13 years, at EqualityMaine, I've had the good fortune advocating for inclusive policies and procedures, locally and nationally, that ensure transgender people, young and old, get to experience sports, like everyone else. Most recently, I was a featured speaker at a Title IX summit at NBA headquarters, hosted by the GLSEN, New Balance, and the WNBA.

Today, I'm here testifying on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community, which according to the latest data includes 7% of adults<sup>1</sup> and 25% of teenagers.<sup>2</sup> That's roughly 120,000 Mainers. This voluminous population and lovely allies, vigorously reject this bucket of bills:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.axios.com/2024/02/15/lgbt-american-communities-states-data>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.maine.gov/miyhs/2023-results>

LD 233- An Act to Prohibit Biological Males from Participating in School Athletic Programs and Activities Designated for Females When State Funding Is Provided to the School  
LD 868 - An Act to Ensure Equity and Safety in Athletics, Restrooms, Changing Rooms and Housing at Elementary, Secondary and Postsecondary Schools  
LD 1002 - An Act to Protect Children's Identification by Requiring Public Schools to Use the Name and Gender Specified on a Child's Birth Certificate  
LD 1134 - An Act to Prohibit Males from Participating in Female Sports or Using Female Facilities  
LD 1704 - An Act to Prohibit a School Administrative Unit from Adopting a Policy That Allows a Student to Use a Restroom Designated for Use by the Opposite Sex

These bills attempt to roll back decades of progress that have made Maine one of the most welcoming and inclusive states in the country. None of these bills will make Maine a better or safer place to raise a family, go to school, work, retire, or visit as a tourist. None of these bills address the real issues Mainers are concerned about in our daily lives, like the cost of healthcare, the cost of food and fuel, the cost of housing, substance use, the climate, or workforce development, to name a few.

Combined, these antiquated bills try to turn back time, treating transgender students as second class citizens. Individually, they attempt to dig-up settled issues, issues this committee, the legislature, the public, and the courts, have confronted over decades, and have historically decided time and time again, to affirm the dignity and humanity of transgender people, whether we're talking about kids participating in school activities like sports, where kids go to the bathroom, or whether we can call a student by the name they prefer, is settled, because it's best for kids.

What these bills attempt to do is target a small and special part of our community, transgender people, and what's worse, they're attacking trans kids. As a transgender woman, now in my late 50's, I know intimately what it feels like to be a target, a target of hate, bias, discrimination, and violence. You know, by the time I walked to kindergarten in 1972, I knew I was more like my two sisters, than my four brothers. I didn't have the eloquent language to explain what that felt like as a five year old, but I knew who I was, but unfortunately, the world around me wasn't very welcoming to trans girl like me, especially in my conservative catholic family, and a culture that demonized LGBTQ+ people. So I tried hard to hide who I was, afraid of being found out and ridiculed. But, of course parts of who I am showed up, and I was quickly punished, attacked, and called names. By high school the name calling became more intense and threats of violence became real. Being attacked in front of hundreds of classmates in my high school



cafeteria, taught me that being truly myself was not only going to be difficult, but was going to be dangerous.

A year later, unsure about who I could trust and confind in about my identity, I tried to kill myself. I didn't do it because I was depressed, I tried to die because I thought my family and friends wouldn't understand or love me, and I didn't want to be a burden to my parents. Perhaps I survived that suicide attempt and other numerous near death experiences, so I could be here with you today. And remind you why we're here, that we're talking about kids. Young people deserve to be loved, and provided opportunities, especially in school, to feel safe, to be themselves, without fear, without feeling like a second class citizen, and definitely not a burden, so every kid gets a chance to thrive, and live to become an adult.

I believe you're going to do the right thing and oppose all these bills, because you care about kids. It's not only the right thing to do, it's the moral thing to do.

Thank you,

Gia Drew (she/her)  
Executive Director, EqualityMaine