

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Rev. Erika Hewitt. I live in Bath, and I'm speaking in opposition of the bills before the committee today.

Before being invited to serve my denomination in a national role, I served as a church pastor for twenty years—many of them here in Maine. I chose Maine as my permanent home 12 years ago in large part because of who we are as a people: how Maine's fiercely independent people also choose to look out for their neighbors.

When we care for someone who needs it, it's not out of pity. We might help others out of kindness, or because we can—and often because either someone once helped us, or we know that we might need a hand someday.

Our lives are connected and interdependent. That is, to me, both a moral platform and a religious statement: we belong to one another.

I believe, too., that all of us—you, me, and even the people in this room with whom I profoundly disagree—come into this world whole. Not broken; not in need of redemption; not needing to do anything to earn worth and dignity. Everyone is inherently whole, worthy, and loved by a Force beyond our understanding.

Since some people, by virtue of who they are, are pushed to the margins or otherwise put at risk, we whose social privilege places us at the center of belonging have a responsibility to protect and care for the vulnerable; the marginalized; the disempowered.

In our country, our communities, and even our churches, transgender people are being dehumanized in attempts to deny their inherent dignity and worth. Laws and policies that make transgender people an "other"—and the bills you're considering today—feed this dehumanization.

As a faith leader, I urge you to recognize your legislative choices as bearing moral and ethical weight: Whose integrity is worthy of protecting? What values and principles are you communicating by saying *No* to bills whose intent is to harm and diminish? If an ethos of interdependence and mutual care is how we wish to live, as the people of Maine, which choice communicates that obligation to look out for one another?

**I urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on these bills.** Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee.