

Rabbi Jared H. Saks
Portland, Maine
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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Rabbi Jared H. Saks and I am a resident of Portland. I serve as the spiritual leader of Congregation Bet Ha'am in South Portland, which is Maine's largest synagogue, serving roughly 1000 members throughout southern and midcoast Maine. I am here to speak in opposition to the bills before the committee today, specifically this morning LD 233, LD 868, LD 1002, LD 1134, and LD 1704.

I have been a congregational rabbi in Reform Judaism for nearly 2 decades and have served in Maine for the past 14 years. My religious tradition teaches that each person is created, as stated in Genesis 1:27, *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God, and that how we treat each other is a measure of our relationship with God. Additionally, Jewish tradition specifically teaches about gender in texts dating back thousands of years with mention of at least six different genders across the gender spectrum.

Throughout my career, I have worked with numerous transgender and non-binary youth, young adults, and adult members of my congregation. I can tell you beyond a shadow of a doubt that we are all better when we affirm the inherent worth of each person, regardless of their gender identity or which pronouns they might use. Anti-transgender policies, like sports bans, actively harm LGBTQ youth and detract from real issues that they and their peers face. Bills like the ones before this committee today jeopardize children's mental health. A 2022 survey conducted by the Trevor Project¹ revealed that half of transgender youth seriously consider suicide and one in five trans and non-binary youth attempt suicide each year. The survey also shows that "LGBTQ youth who found their school to be LGBTQ-affirming reported lower rates of attempting suicide." If these bills become law, they will harm our youth and subject any girl who wants to play sports to an examination of her genitalia. Opposing these bills, however, will literally save lives.

Jewish communities like Congregation Bet Ha'am firmly believe that all people deserve the right to live as their complete selves, without fear and intimidation. We support transgender people's rights because of our Jewish values, not in spite of them. Bans like the ones proposed in these pieces of legislation are harmful to all Maine women and girls. For all these reasons, I urge you to oppose LD 233, LD 868, LD 1002, LD 1134, and LD 1704.

¹ <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/>