

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, Maine's largest synagogue, serving roughly 1000 members throughout southern and midcoast Maine. I am here today in opposition to the bills before the committee today, specifically this afternoon LD 1337 and LD 1432.

My Reform Jewish tradition's support for transgender inclusion is deeply rooted in Jewish text and tradition. Many Jewish texts proudly affirm the existence of transgender, non-binary, intersex, and gender expansive individuals. There are hundreds of references to at least six different sex and gender identities across Jewish legal codes and rabbinic commentary. As a Reform Jew and a Reform rabbi, my deep faith and a commitment to transgender inclusion are not mutually exclusive but rather essential parts of what it means to be Jewish.

Over the 14 years that I have served as the rabbi at Congregation Bet Ha'am, I have worked with numerous transgender and non-binary youth, young adults, and adults. My community is better because of their presence. How we treat others, especially those on the fringes of society, is a reflection of our relationship with God. Changes to the Maine Human Rights Act that would allow discrimination against some citizens of this state is not only wrong, it is morally reprehensible.

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. For all these reasons, I urge you to oppose LD 1337 and LD 1432.