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ONTP
LDs: 233, 868,1002, 1134 and 1704

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Kelli Deveaux from Gorham, and I am here today as a leadership team member of Support Maine's Public Schools. SMPS is a small but mighty all volunteer statewide nonprofit that was formed because we live in a time in which citizens must fight against the extremist and politically motivated attacks on our institutions of public education in our state. These attacks are ordered and funded at a national level, and are designed to dismantle public education, exactly because it is a critical cornerstone to a functioning democracy. Our mission is to organize, equip, and empower Mainers to defend the rights of all students to a safe, inclusive, and equitable public education in our state. We help them to defend local control, their beloved educators and institutions, and to demand honest education.

We track the national efforts and the latest campaigns against public education. Our organization and indeed this legislature has seen the topics change, (critical race theory, social emotional learning, book banning) but the goals have remained the same. And the tactics are equally recycled, and can be traced to some of the darkest times in American history, if you care to look back. And if you were privileged enough to have received an honest and accurate education, you should already know this.

But just in case, here is your study guide to the play book. First, you have to "other" marginalized communities within our schools. They have to be made inferior, less intelligent, less civilized, less stable, less American, less worthy, anything, just as long as it is less than.

Next is the invented crisis; that by having these people in our schools, that all other children are in some kind of danger. There will be contagion, distraction, confusion, or harm if "those people" are allowed in our schools. Once you can get the fever up, then there is step 3. You offer the solutions that they are separated from the masses. Separate but equal opportunity, it's only fair. It is especially helpful if you can get someone to offer some truly horrifying solution, "no one would accept such cruel treatment" options, this is called a foil, so that your separate but equal effort to deny the basic rights of inclusion of some citizens seems vastly more reasonable. Denying access to things like water fountains, public transportation, public spaces, or bathrooms is a good start, if you claim it's a safety issue. And repeat.

The targets have included immigrants and refugees. It has been black and brown people, it has been women, japanese, or any other asians swept up accidentally, catholics, jews and communists. It has been those with special needs. Now it is LGBTQIA+ humans that are in our schools.

LGBTQIA+ students are not new in our schools or on our sports teams. In fact, as a high school principal, I was a part of the first hearing held by Maine Principals Association, a process they created in the early 2000s, by which a student and their family could appeal to play as the gender to which they identified. Where was the uproar then? There was nothing to gain, and in fact, during that time Maine Human Rights Act affirmed that gender identify is protected for Maine citizens, including our children.

We all care about children. We all care about our schools. But we are all being bombarded with the national extremist agenda that is trying to extort states to sacrifice the rights of their citizens or face some kind of financial backlash. We are being fed lies about our neighbors, schools and children, with the hope of sowing mistrust in one another, so that we will sanction the discrimination of others.

But the Federal administration's "comply or else you lose funding" narrative false, it's a lie. Because that isn't how federal title funding works. And the recent decision on USDA funding being restored proves this point. Because even IF a school is violating Title IX in the eyes of the federal Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, they could only lawfully withhold the funding that is affiliated with that specific offending activity. Do you know how much federal funding supports athletic programs in Maine schools? \$0.00 The fear of losing federal funding is causing school boards to consider changing policies, but it is an empty threat.

This is not about trans kids, or girls' safety. This is not about federal funding. It's a distraction to keep us focused on fighting with one another and not on the chaos being created behind the curtain. Because while we are distracted and disgruntled, they can begin taking away the right of a free, honest, equitable education for all. Today trans kids, tomorrow those who receive special education. When will it be your kids? Stand up and be the voice of reason, of inclusion and of the Maine I want to raise my children in.

I urge you all to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD. 233, 868, 1002, 1134 and 1704.