

The Rev. Gwen Fry
Brunswick, Maine
May 8, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding the human rights of transgender Mainers.

I am The Rev. Gwen Fry, I'm a resident of Brunswick, currently serving St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Waterville as their Priest in Charge. I also happen to be a transgender woman. I am here on behalf of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine and the transgender community.

I rise in opposition to the bills before the committee today because I have personally experienced the devastating effects of not having the basic rights and protections afforded most people.

I came out and socially transitioned in Little Rock, Arkansas 11 years ago. I have experienced being ignored by people working in restaurants and department stores. I have been the recipient of hateful speech and death threats. I have been stalked by a person in my neighborhood. The trans community has learned that it is not safe to get the authorities involved because of the abuse and assaults perpetrated on trans people, particularly transgender women, by those in authority. That is a major reason why I left the state of Arkansas and relocated to Maine. I saw that the trans community was protected from discrimination under the nondiscrimination laws of our state.

Because of that, and the expansive theology of The Episcopal Church, I found a home here in the Diocese of Maine. I have been given the opportunity to exercise my ministry because of the inclusion of gender identity and gender expression in the Episcopal Church's non discrimination canon law. I believe this inclusion is an extension of the church's baptism vow to respect the dignity of every human being. I am honored to serve a church that feeds the hungry and affirms and celebrates the outcast.

My church and now my state protects the trans community. I no longer live in fear to leave my house like I did in Arkansas because of the protections afforded me here in Maine.

If these bills pass we will be taking giant steps backwards and my small community will experience a return to the same discrimination and oppression I fled moving to Maine.

The Williams Institute at UCLA estimates that there are 5,900 transgender residents in Maine. (That is smaller than the population of Gardiner.) That is .5%-- less than 1%-- of our population.

1000 of us are 65 or older and approximately 1,200 youth in our state are transgender. All of these transgender bills are solutions to a "problem" that doesn't exist.

As Episcopal Bishop Maryann Budde preached in January, "In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now." I ask that the state I have chosen to call home to choose mercy over oppression and discrimination to a small, extremely vulnerable, population. We ask that you respect the dignity of all of us in the transgender community.

If this bill passes, Maine will be on the fast track to mirroring the oppression and ostracization of transgender people-- just like Arkansas has. We are not Arkansas. We are a state who prides itself on the adage of live and let live. In the name of the One who fearlessly and wonderfully created me just as I am, I urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on these bills.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my unique perspective and experiences with the Committee.