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Testimony of Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics in Opposition to LD 1002 "An Act to Protect Children's Identification by Requiring Public Schools to Use the Name and Gender Specified on a Child's Birth Certificate". May 8, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Judiciary Committee I am Dr. Deborah Hagler. I reside in Harpswell. I practiced pediatrics for the last 27 years in the Brunswick area. I am a past President of the Maine Chapter of the AAP and currently co- Chair the Healthy Mental Development of the Board of the Maine Chapter.

The Maine AAP is a professional organization representing 300 pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists working together to further our mission to improve the lives of children and adolescents in Maine. We are deeply concerned about the harmful consequences of a host of bills presented today on the care and well-being of transgender and gender diverse youth. I am testifying in opposition to LD 1002 "An Act to Protect Children's Identification by Requiring Public Schools to Use the Name and Gender Specified on a Child's Birth Certificate" You will hear from or receive testimony from several of my colleagues.

Using a youth's chosen name is considered a proxy for gender affirmation and this potentially will mean a lot to approximately 3.2% of Maine middle school students and 4.5 % of Maine's high school students who identified as transgender in the 2023 Maine Integrated health survey.¹ The few trans youth that I have cared for over the years are amazing kids and in general so are their families. These youngsters have been bright, creative, and curious, a mixture of artists, musicians, athletes and outdoor enthusiasts. I have also seen some tragic rejections by families with patients left to couch surf and kids making some scary suicide attempts. They are all frankly wonderful humans, and none have escaped some suffering from a spotlight and application of stigma that does not belong upon them. They are trying to grow up and figure out childhood and adolescence with an additional challenge and everyone else's judgement and uninformed opinions really are not helpful.

To that end a high number of these kids will have a mental health diagnosis. According to the Trevor project: in Maine that 72% of TG and non-binary youth suffer from anxiety; 55% from depression; 42% seriously considered suicide in the past year; and 18% made a suicide attempt² - In my mind that speaks a great deal to the additional challenge of being trans or gender diverse. The American Psychiatric Association and the AAP also notes the discrimination and stigma felt significantly affects mental health.

*"Being transgender or gender variant implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability, or general social or vocational capabilities; however, these individuals often experience discrimination due to a lack of civil rights protections for their gender identity or expression. ... [Such] discrimination and lack of equal civil rights is damaging to the mental health of transgender and gender variant individuals."*³

Gender affirming policies and antidiscrimination protections are indeed protective of youth mental health.

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Researchers from University of Texas at Austin, University of British Columbia and NYU

Studied a cohort of transgender and gender nonconforming youth in 3 cities in the United States.

The more contexts youths were allowed to use their chosen name the less likely they were to experience symptoms of depression, suicidal ideation and exhibit suicidal behavior- an increase in one context predicted a 56% decrease in suicidal behavior and a 29% drop in depressive behavior and 5.37 unit drop in symptoms on a depressive scale.⁴

Honestly being seen and treated with dignity and respect by being addressed by a preferred name should be the norm no matter the age and circumstances. I think we can all appreciate this. Allowing youth to be respected at school by being addressed by the name of their choice is a simple low-cost intervention that can save lives.

The Maine AAP strongly encourages you to vote not to pass for LD 1002 and support youth growing to meet their fullest potential.

1. Maine Integrated Health Survey

2. Trevor Project 2024 Survey of Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People in Maine

3. Jason Rafferty, COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH, COMMITTEE ON ADOLESCENCE, SECTION ON LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER HEALTH AND WELLNESS, Michael Yogman, Rebecca Baum, Thresia B. Gambon, Arthur Lavin, Gerri Mattson, Lawrence Sagin Wissow, Cora Breuninger, Elizabeth M. Alderman, Laura K. Grubb, Makia E. Powers, Krishna Upadhyay, Stephenie B. Wallace, Lynn Hunt, Anne Teresa Gearhart, Christopher Harris, Kathryn Melland Lowe, Chadwick Taylor Rodgers, Ilana Michelle Sherer; Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children and Adolescents. *Pediatrics* October 2018; 142 (4): e20182162. 10.1542/peds.2018-2162

4. Russell ST, Pollitt AM, Li G, Grossman AH. Chosen Name Use Is Linked to Reduced Depressive Symptoms, Suicidal Ideation, and Suicidal Behavior Among Transgender Youth. *J Adolesc Health*. 2018 Oct;63(4):503-505. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2018.02.003. Epub 2018 Mar 30. PMID: 29609917; PMCID: PMC6165713.