

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Austin Vaughan, I'm a Topsham resident and a 4th year medical student at the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine currently living in Topsham. I'm here to testify in strong opposition to the bills being heard today.

In the pediatric community, we know that transgender youth deal with outsized struggles with mental health due to increased experiences with bullying, lack of acceptance by peers, and the overall burdens with stigma. The fact that we are talking about removing one of the purest avenues of community-building and growth from these kids is truly shameful.

During my time in medical school, I had the privilege to spend two years working in and alongside the Sports Equity Lab, a group of passionate athletes-turned-scientists whose goal is to reduce inequity in sport, and in turn use sport to reduce inequities in society. And I can tell you after reading countless surveys, articles, and research papers (at one point I was doing literature reviews at 4AM on zoom with a colleague in Australia) regarding safety for youth athletes, not one of them included the dangers of transgender participation.

Because if we cared about safety in locker rooms, we would be talking about the multiple studies which show roughly 1 in 50 children is sexually abused by a coach before the age of 18¹. If we cared about protecting girls from injury, we would talk about how women are twice as likely to get a concussion than men in similar sports, as well as take longer to recover and are at risk for more severe short and long-term symptoms -- and yet are still underrepresented in research². And if we cared about fairness and parity in women's sports, we would talk about the lack of funding and inequities in playing surface, equipment, and strength/conditioning that also leave girls at greater risk of muscular injury.

But instead we're here, targeting an already vulnerable population.

Nine days from now I will graduate as a physician. I plan on spending the next 3 years learning everything I can in the hopes that I will be able to use that knowledge to one day save the life of a child. But I'm also acutely aware that the three main causes of adolescent death: gun violence, motor vehicle accidents, and suicide, are areas where elected representatives such as yourselves have more opportunities to save lives than I ever will.

Because while we know that transgender youth are at a much higher risk of attempting suicide, there's also research showing a 34 percent decrease in suicide attempts for transgender children who have at least one peer in their life supportive of their gender identity³. And one of the many wonderful things about acceptance is that it is contagious – and sometimes starts in unexpected places.

I urge you to vote not to pass on the bills being heard today, and show these courageous youth that Maine is a place where they are accepted, where they are valued, and where they belong.

Thank you for your time.

1. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5067151/#R22>
2. <https://healthcare.utah.edu/healthfeed/2024/09/uneven-playing-field-female-athletes-are-more-likely-get-concussions-males>
3. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9991447/>