

May 9, 2025

Good day Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Greg Marley and I am a mental health professional living in Rockland Maine.

I stand in opposition to the array of anti trans bills you are hearing today. Bills that seek to place a target of hate on our children who live their lives as transgender or gender non-conforming. It deeply disturbs me that the conservative elements in this state and across our nation have chosen gender identity and especially people living was trans as a target to vilify. They are seeking to gain political traction by, once again dividing us and setting up a target for hate. I count on the rational majority in the Maine House and Senate to not allow these proposed laws to pass.

I spent 20 years working across Maine delivering suicide prevention messaging, training and consultation to school staff, health and mental health clinicians, first responders, veteran-serving groups and others. The intent of that work was to prepare people to save the lives of vulnerable people in their families, their work and in their communities. I also spent those years responding in the aftermath of traumatic deaths, mostly suicides to support the people left behind. Much of that traumatic grief work was with schools and school communities after the death of a youth. Most were known or suspected suicides. And way too many of those young people were struggling with how to live their life as a member of the queer community; gay, lesbian, bisexual, or describing their sexuality "in some other other way" than heterosexual. And other youth were struggling to live their lives as they grappled with their gender identity. **AND LETS BE CLEAR.** Their struggles were overwhelmingly about accepting who they are in a society filled with messages that denigrate their identity. They face far more bullying and harassment than their Cis peers.

The biannual Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey asks Middle and High School students to self-identify as heterosexual, gay or lesbian, bisexual or identifying their sexuality in some other way. It asks youth to identify themselves as cisgender, transgender or not sure of their gender identity. When you correlate their answers signifying transgender or questioning their gender identity with their responses to questions about symptoms of depression, suicide ideation, suicide planning or past suicide suicide attempts the data is clear and shocking. The highest risk of suicide is among those youth who self-identify as transgender or questioning their gender identity. And those LGB youth were not too far below them in risk.

The polarized political landscape that seeks to make transgender kids the problem erodes their safety net further and will further increase their risk of suicide, running away from home, substance use and mental health challenges. These children deserve a life free of hate. They are our neighbors, our family members, the children of our friends. Please act with clear minds to stop making them the problem; vote ought not to pass on these bills. Thank you.

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