

To Sen. Joseph Rafferty and Rep. Michael Brennan of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

As a Maine father, husband, and taxpayer, I am asking you to vote against Chapter 117.

Equality Maine, a resource linked on the Maine DOE LGBTQ+ Student Resources page claims to be “committed to making schools safer by working with administrators, teachers, parents, and students in every way we can” and “with school faculty on how to address anti-LGBTQ+ bullying and how they can create an inclusive school environment for their transgender students” (*Equality*). Such claims beg many questions: If a biologically female student does not want to share a bathroom or locker room with a biologically male student who claims to be female, is the biological female participating in “bullying”? If a parent does not deem it “safe” to affirm a child’s gender expression via changed names, changed pronouns, or chemical/surgical intervention, who gets to decide what is or is not safe? Is a parent deemed “abusive” if they do not support their child’s supposed gender expression? Are their children then considered not “safe” in the presence of such parents? What if the family’s religious beliefs conflict with *Equality Maine*’s or other Maine DOE recommended resources’ fundamental premises re: gender/sexuality? Whose beliefs determine what is best for the child? By what standard is this determined? Who gets to determine? If it is the subjective definition of “safety” framed by the Maine DOE LGBTQ+ resource page, it seems the state has determined itself as the arbiter of “right” belief albeit grounded in an ideological perspective representative of a small portion of only half of the political spectrum.

Evidence of school officials secretly pushing gender ideology on students has been found both in our own state and across the nation. Examples range from the 13-year old girl in Hermon, Maine in January 2023 who was secretly provided a chest binder by her school counselor and addressed with male pronouns by her teachers without the knowledge or consent of her mother (who is now suing the school board), to the 11-year old boy who in February 2023 at a school board meeting in Windham, who read a graphic depiction of gay sex between minors from a book taken out of his school library. Nationally, more examples come forth every week. To allow masters-level counselors the right to undisclosed “privileged communication” at a time where such examples are shared far and wide, and terms like “abuse” and “safety” have become so subjective, will utterly destroy already waning parental confidence in Maine public education. The precedent to separate children from parents who do not share or deem “safe” such ideological views about gender has already been established in California Assembly bill AB 665, and Ch. 117 holds much the same implication (*Malbin*). To undermine the parent/child bond is to undermine the nuclear family which is to undermine society. This decision will reverberate far beyond the walls of our schools and already has.

The so-called “therapeutic” aspect of the gender-affirming-model is very quickly being undermined by nations discontinuing “gender-affirming” therapies and shutting down gender clinics because such “therapies” have done far more harm than good (*segm.org*). If there isn’t a biological imperative and such practices have been deemed harmful by nations farther into this experimental “affirming” model than the US, why is Maine continuing to push this from the highest levels of government? Why does the Maine DOE defer to groups that deem this

ideological stance a moral good in spite of the empirical evidence to the contrary? By what moral standard are such judgments being made?

After parents became aware of this subject matter being taught to their children during the school closures of 2020 many began to homeschool, which skyrocketed in Maine, and despite a recent drop in homeschoolers since the 21-22 school year, remains higher than before the pandemic (*Revello*). Catholic school enrollment rose in 2022 for the first time in 25 years. While the Manhattan Institute views this trend primarily as a response to school closures due to Covid-19, the implication of so many students transitioning from secular schools to a vastly more traditional cultural environment as Catholic schools cannot be ignored (*Manhattan Institute*). A cultural shift is taking place and this decision reflects that larger conflict. This is a war of ideas with our children caught in the middle. Historically when the State decides it is a better parent to the polity's children than the actual parents themselves, we are on a very dark path indeed.

Your vote has much larger implications for the state of Maine and the country. I thank you for your time and your consideration.

Tyler Wentland

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