

Faith Barnes
Brunswick
LD 1704

TO: Senator Anne Carney, Representative William Pluecker and Members of the
Judiciary Committee

FROM: Faith Barnes, LCSW

DATE: May 6, 2025

RE: LD 233, LD 868, LD 1002, LD 1134, LD 1704

I am a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Brunswick. As Unitarian Universalists, we proclaim that our principles and values unequivocally commit our faith to honor and celebrate the full spectrum of gender identity and expression. Being transgender or identifying with any gender other than the one assigned at birth, is a beautiful and divine manifestation of humanity; as is being intersex, or having sex characteristics that vary from what is considered typical. As Unitarian Universalists, we affirm the inherent worthiness and dignity of each person as a core principle. The ability to live ever-more authentically as one's true self is central to a lifelong journey towards spiritual fulfillment.

These bans would invite any person to call for an invasive or traumatizing "gender check" on any girl who wants to play sports if they think she is "too tall" or "too strong." Anti-trans activists are seeking broad exclusion of a vulnerable group of students with one-size-fits-all rules. They are using trans athletes as a weapon to further their agenda, in an attempt to strip people from historically oppressed groups of their fundamental rights - not just LGBTQ folks, but also people of color, women, immigrants, and many others. By denying trans youth the opportunity to be who they are, we are in effect, saying that they do not exist. This attitude has major implications for their mental health. As the 2023 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey makes clear, LGBTQ students are at higher risk than heterosexual students for suicidal ideation and being targets of unsafe behavior. In middle schools across the state, 83% of heterosexual students feel safe at school, but only 18% of LGBTQ students do. Even in high school, more heterosexual students feel safe (88%) than LGBTQ students (74%). LGBTQ high school students are three times more likely to be targeted for forced sexual favors than heterosexual students, and suicidal ideation is three times higher among LGBTQ students than heterosexual students in both middle and high school.

Before I retired as a clinical social worker, I had several teenage LGBTQ clients who questioned their gender identity. They were clearly struggling. I saw them for their chosen gender, helped them tell their families and find resources to support them in their school and community. Their transformation from deeply unhappy, awkward teens to happier, less stressed teens was truly remarkable. I've seen their suffering. Please do the right thing and oppose this bill.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.