

Kayla Berninghaus  
South Portland  
LD 1432

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee:

While I am unable to attend the public hearing in person, I am grateful for the opportunity to address the Committee with a written testimony. My name is Kayla Berninghaus, and I am a resident of South Portland and a mental health professional working in Portland. I am writing as a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in vehement opposition of LD 380, LD 1432, and LD 1337.

As a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor, I work with queer and trans young people in my practice. I have repeatedly witnessed the impact that gender affirming care and gender affirming environments at home and school have on mental health outcomes. You have the opportunity to ensure that trans and nonbinary young people feel welcomed and entitled to universal rights to life.

In 2024, Lee et al. found that state level anti-transgender laws increased incidents of suicide attempts among trans and nonbinary young people by anywhere from 7–72%. On the other hand, a study by Tordoff et al. in 2022 found that gender-affirming medical interventions for transgender and nonbinary youth were associated with lower odds of depression and suicidality over 12 months.

Maine must stand up against the national political agenda interfering with the expert opinions of medical professionals to protect a vulnerable population. Thirty leading medical groups, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, recognize the medical necessity of treatments for gender dysphoria and endorse such treatments. Repealing Maine's Shield Law would subject Maine's already-strained healthcare infrastructure to unnecessary harm and repel providers like me.

Passing LD 380, LD 1432, and LD 1337 would reward the federal government's bullying tactics. Do you want to open the door for further attacks on Mainers' civil rights for laws that have been in place for decades? Changing Maine's laws to discriminate against trans people will not make Maine more safe or fair for anyone.

I appreciate this opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I strongly urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on these bills.