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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee; my name is Justin Bondesen of South Paris Maine. I've been an educator in the state for 15 years, and more importantly, a step dad to a 3rd grader. I testify in strong opposition to the bills before the committee today. They are unnecessary, harmful, and will only further demean an already marginalized community in our state.

This group of bills is paired with national rhetoric—exemplified by our President illegally attempting to withhold funds from our state—based on the false premise that allowing trans youth to use restrooms, play on teams, and use names and pronouns that correspond with their gender identity will open other youth to assault in the locker room and unfair competition on the field.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Trans youth are significantly more likely to experience violence and harassment than perpetrate it. And in a group at a much higher risk of suicide, allowing trans youth to access gender-affirming activities and care saves lives. What is the benefit of denying them the sense of belonging and growth that team sports brings? Surely the sponsors of these bills are prepared to pass just as much legislation addressing the very real problems of violence from hazing and sexual assault by coaches in high school sports?

As for the idea of fairness on the field, trans youth vary just as much as their cis peers in body size and drive. Indeed, this set of bills purporting to "protect girls" subjects them to further scrutiny, policing of their bodies and condoning harassment by peers and spectators if they don't appear "female enough."

And sports aside, since it's clear that the "issue" of trans youth in sports is the basis for rolling back all of their civil protections in our state, forcing schools to refer to a person by the gender and name on their birth certificate removes a basic and frankly harmless opportunity for them to explore their identity—a fundamental part of adolescence.

Among my friends I am lucky to count several trans humans who are also leaders in our community; hard-working and kind. They are fantastic mentors and role models for my step-daughter. These bills would endorse the culture of fear and hate that trans people face everyday, increasing the risk they're exposed to by engaging in their civic duties.

In my work in various school districts and camps with all kinds of students, I have come to know quite a few trans youth. I find them to be among the bravest young people I know: they often have to wrestle with the impossible cost of being ostracized by their families for being true to themselves. Part of the beauty and challenge of being a teenager is figuring out who you are—it's not a direct or easy journey for anyone, and there's much trial and error. I judge we do more harm than good when we force youth into boxes based on the gametes their bodies produce. I invite you to look at the data: with all the problems affecting our youth, even specifically abuse and violence toward student athletes, all this energy focused on repressing trans kids is outrageously misguided. Let them play ball.

I urge the committee to vote "ought not to pass" on this collection of bills, which represents a misguided effort to erase trans people. Thank you for your time.