

Testimony Opposing LD 868: An Act to Ensure Equity and Safety in Athletics, Restrooms, Changing Rooms and Housing at Elementary, Secondary and Postsecondary Schools

Honorable members of the committee,

My name is Katie Brydon, and I am writing today as a parent and a teacher in our vibrant state of Maine. I am testifying in opposition of LD 868 as a private citizen, but I also think it's important to note that – like you all – I am a committed and passionate civic servant. I serve on the Bangor School Department School Board and chair the City of Bangor's Advisory Committee for Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Human Rights. I understand the challenges of creating policies and setting decisions into motion that have a profound impact on my community. But I also choose to spend my life, here in Bangor, at 51 Poplar Street, dedicated to fostering a community where every individual feels safe, valued, and has the opportunity to thrive. That is why the very premise of LD 868 – a bill cloaked in the guise of equity and safety – fills me with profound disappointment and frankly, a deep sense of outrage.

To suggest that we need legislation to dictate who can use which restroom or participate in which athletic team based on some arbitrary definition of "biological" sex is not only a step backward but a harmful intrusion into the lives of our young people. It sends a chilling message that we, as a state, are choosing to prioritize the marginalization of vulnerable students over creating truly safe and inclusive environments for *all* children. This is not the Maine I believe in, and it is certainly not the example we should be setting for the next generation.

As a teacher, I witness firsthand the importance of learning environments being supportive spaces where every student can learn and participate without fear. LD 868 actively undermines this goal. When more children participate in extracurricular activities, including sports, our school climates are strengthened, and students develop crucial social and emotional skills. To erect barriers that prevent transgender students from participating is to deny them these vital opportunities and to foster an environment of exclusion, not safety.

The idea that we need this act to ensure fairness in athletics is particularly troubling. Participating in sports teaches invaluable lessons – perseverance, dedication, self-assurance, and teamwork. We should be championing increased participation, not inventing problems where none exist and creating a system ripe for discrimination. Imagine the chilling effect of this bill: any girl deemed "too tall" or "too strong" could be subjected to invasive interrogation, their very identity questioned and challenged publicly. This isn't about fairness; it's about opening the door to harassment and bullying on a state-sanctioned level.

Furthermore, the implications of this bill extend far beyond athletics. Suggesting that we need to regulate restroom and changing room access based on a narrow definition of sex

assigned at birth is not about safety; it is about creating a climate of fear and distrust for transgender students. It emboldens those who would seek to police gender expression and invites the very real possibility of harassment and discrimination against *all* students who may not conform to rigid gender stereotypes. This legislation would empower schools to engage in the harmful policing of gender norms, disproportionately affecting girls of color and causing immense fear and confusion for students, families, and educators alike.

It is also critical to understand that **transgender individuals are not the perpetrators of violence that this bill seems to imply. In fact, the evidence overwhelmingly shows that transgender individuals are disproportionately more likely to be the *targets* of violence and discrimination, including sexual assault, compared to their cisgender peers.** The notion that transgender individuals pose a heightened safety risk is a harmful and unfounded stereotype that fuels discriminatory legislation like LD 868. Our focus should be on protecting vulnerable students, and the data clearly indicates that transgender students are among those most in need of our protection and support, not further marginalization.

The issues of fairness in sports are already being thoughtfully addressed by the appropriate organizations and governing bodies. They are capable of creating and implementing policies that ensure fair play without resorting to discriminatory legislation that harms an entire group of young people. This bill is not only unnecessary but actively harmful.

We must stand firm against the tide of national political agendas that seek to interfere with our rights to create our own just and equitable laws here in Maine. LD 868 is discriminatory on its face and flies in the face of both state and federal constitutional guarantees of equal protection. It ignores the Maine Human Rights Act, which has protected gender identity since 2005. Passing this act would not make Maine safer or fairer; it would only serve to codify discrimination and harm our most vulnerable students.

I urge you to reject LD 868 and instead commit to fostering school environments where every child, regardless of their gender identity, feels safe, respected, and has the opportunity to thrive. Our focus should be on building bridges of understanding and inclusion, not erecting walls of division and discrimination based on baseless fears.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Katie Brydon" with a stylized flourish at the end.

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LD 868

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Furthermore, the implications of this bill extend far beyond athletics. Suggesting that we need to regulate restroom and changing room access based on a narrow definition of sex assigned at birth is not about safety; it is about creating a climate of fear and distrust for transgender students. It emboldens those who would seek to police gender expression and invites the very real possibility of harassment and discrimination against all students who may not conform to rigid gender stereotypes. This legislation would empower schools to engage in the harmful policing of gender norms, disproportionately affecting girls of color and causing immense fear and confusion for students, families, and educators alike.

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