

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee. My name is Craig Cardamone and I am a resident of Winterport and I am writing to encourage you to vote in opposition to LD 1704, An Act to Prohibit a School Administrative Unit from Adopting a Policy That Allows a Student to Use a Restroom Designated for Use by the Opposite Sex.

As a licensed marriage and family therapist serving people all across the state and specifically working with people in the transgender community I know the inevitable mental health suffering this bill will cause if it were to pass. Due to being bound by confidentiality I cannot speak about the individual experiences of my clients, but I can provide my understanding of what they go through as well as data from states that have already enacted similar bills. In most of my sessions with my transgender clients, we speak about the discrimination, trauma, and distress they experience living in a culture that continuously targets their wellbeing and safety. They describe their experiences of living in today's political climate like "terrified", "paralyzed by fear", "completely shut down". This bill contributes to dangerous myths about trans people as well as the harmful political rhetoric currently being disseminated by the media and political leaders. Many of my clients specifically name the ability to use restrooms and locker rooms that align with their gender identity as positive for mental wellbeing. My clients also say that they fear being physically or sexually attacked if they are forced to use restrooms that do not align with their gender identity. It is common knowledge in therapy practice that experiencing discrimination and the possibility of being assaulted exacerbates preexisting mental health conditions and increases the risk of suicide amongst people in the trans community. I have never had a cis-gender client express concern for their safety because trans people are allowed to use restrooms that align with their gender identity.

I also work with parents of trans youth. In our session we consistently discuss their worries and fears about their child's wellbeing in the face of discrimination in our larger institutions. Children who feel unsafe, stressed, and terrified cannot learn effectively, have trouble establishing friendships, and experience an increase in suicidal ideation. Parents often describe their experiences as "powerless", "frightened for the wellbeing of my child", and "desperate for finding safety for their child". Whenever a child feels accepted by their parents and broader community they experience improvement in most markers of wellbeing. This is especially true of trans youth. This bill ultimately sends a message to transgender children and their parents that the state does not care about their wellbeing and will in fact try to make things more challenging for them.

Beyond my professional experience various public surveys, scientific data, and other policy spaces suggest bills that prevent trans people from using restrooms that align with their gender identity have dire consequences on their wellbeing. Here are some examples. According to information presented by the UCLA law school in a press release, 68% of trans respondents of a 2008 survey conducted in Washington DC reported they have experienced verbal harassment when forced to use a restroom that doesn't align with their gender identity. In this same press release, a 2015 nationwide survey reported that 55% of trans respondents reported not using the restroom when they had to. Lastly, a 2022 nationwide trans survey reported that 10% of

trans men were denied access to a women's restroom in "bathroom ban" states compared to about 5% in states that allowed trans people to choose which restroom they would use. This same press release reports a 2018 survey done in Massachusetts that no cis-gender women report being harassed or assaulted by a trans women in a women's restroom. In summary, this data shows that the people who are harmed by these types of bathroom bills are trans people. The rhetoric used to justify the passage of these bills are completely unfounded and continue to perpetuate dangerous myths that directly harm trans people. The additional threat of removing funding from the schools uses rhetoric against the trans community as a trojan horse to defund public schools for all children. Instead of forcing children to use restrooms that don't align with their identity and increasing the possibility of mental distress, we should focus on celebrating all children in how they express themselves and how they identify.

Maine should lead the country in making sure all children feel safe and cared for, especially those most vulnerable like transgender youth. I believe there are better and kinder ways for our state to use resources with so many actually urgent matters we need to address. We know that when the most marginalized members of our society are protected, we all benefit. No one benefits from this bill. Please vote not to pass for LD 1704. Thank you.