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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee.

I am the Rev. Christina Cataldo. I live In Sidney and serve as a pastor in Winthrop. I am here today in opposition to all eight bills before the committee.

These bills are written to harm people I care about... my parishioners, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. They tell people I care about that legislators are willing to use the power of the government to make their lives smaller and more isolated. They tell churches like mine that the government has the power to define who is a Christian deserving of having the practices of their faith protected.

I will never forget the time when a Christian friend who lives in another town reached out to me and asked me to pray for a child she knew. That child died by suicide because they saw no hopeful future ahead of them. The language of these bills is the same language that drove that child to despair. My friend asked me to pray for that child using their correct name and pronouns because their own family and community wouldn't. My friend knew that calling people by their name should be no problem for Christians who are happy to switch from Saul to Paul when he was transformed by Christ.

Specifically regarding the bills that are about school activities and facilities, there are lots of ways to protect kids in school. Excluding a small group of kids from sports only serves to make those kids unwelcome at their schools. The only reason to target these kids this way is to enshrine a religious belief about who is deserving of civil rights into legislation. We've had kids using the correct bathrooms for ten years now, and I haven't heard one story about a Maine child being harmed by that choice. In that same time, we've had multiple coaches and guardians arrested and convicted for harming kids in their care.

These bills take away local control from school systems and penalizes parents whose religious faith allows them to affirm their kids. We know that legislation that requires teachers to out students to their guardians actually endangers kids. When we have housing shortages, rural birthing centers closing, and high grocery prices making it hard for families to feed their kids, these bills waste time that could be spent addressing real threats to children's well-being.

This past weekend, an adult cisgender woman in Boston was kicked out of a hotel because someone saw her short hair while she was in the public bathroom and thought she didn't belong. We know that the same thing will happen to kids with short hair or who are taller and stronger than their classmates. Bills like these create an environment of suspicion that makes lots of people suffer, not just the people the sponsors of the bill want to target. Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on these bills. Thank you!"