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Hello, My name is Karina Chandler and I'm a mental health care provider. I'm here today to speak in strong opposition to LD 233, LD 868, LD 1002, LD 1134, and LD 1704.

I am here because I'm terrified for my clients, and I'm also here as a mother of a 5 and 7 year old who wants my kids to grow up in a community where all children feel safe to be who they are. At the public school that kids in our district attend for pre-k, kindergarten, and first grade all the students there learn the school song that has the words "safe and kind, helpful and polite, I try to make a difference every day". The people who have drafted these acts have forgotten about the most basic tenets that us parents are trying to teach our kindergartners about: safety and kindness. How can anyone expect kids to be nice to each other if our own legislators are being unkind to our kids?

As a trauma therapist, for the past 14 years I've worked with many transgender individuals who have experienced deep emotional trauma from being rejected for being who they are within their own families. Many of those individuals felt far safer out of their homes, at their schools and in their communities than they did within their own homes. They've shared with me how life saving it was to have safe adults to turn to when they got to school, guidance counselors, social workers, teachers, and peers who affirmed them and made them feel like they mattered. If our state passes any of the legislation being discussed today we will be ending the protection and safety of trans kids outside of their homes. We will be encouraging systemic discrimination, rejection, and trauma on a statewide level that is unforgivable for our young people.

Let's be clear: these proposals are not about protection or fairness. The titles may sound reasonable—words like "equity," "safety," and "protection" are used—but the reality is these bills target a very small, already marginalized group of children, and the only thing they will cause is harm. These bills are an outsized and obsessive response to a tiny percentage of students. Why are we spending so much time legislating the bodies of children? Why are we fixated on which bathrooms they use, what names they go by, or which sports team they want to join? We are talking about KIDS. Not olympians, not Division one college athletes. CHILDREN, who are trying to figure out who they are in the world, who they want to play with, and with whom they feel safe.

The truth is simple: when transgender youth are affirmed in their identities—when they are respected for who they are—their mental health outcomes are on par with any other kid. But when they are denied that respect, their rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide increase dramatically. These bills would guarantee countless mental health crises and tragically increase the chance of suicidality among trans youth in our state. Is that what you mean when you say "protect our kids"? Try telling that to the parent of a trans child who has killed themselves.

We should be focusing on how to support all students, not turning schools into sites of exclusion and shame.

I urge you to vote “Ought Not to Pass” on all five of these harmful bills. Thank you.