

Testimony Opposing LD 223

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Helen Cohen. As a lifelong Mainer, I oppose LD 223. This bill flies in the face of the Maine Human Rights Act, which explicitly prohibits discrimination based on gender identity. It also undermines two decades of progress toward inclusivity in our schools, which Mainers have time and again, voted in favor of.

This bill operates on stereotypes and generalizations about physical advantage, ignoring the real variation in all athletes. Schools already have the tools to make participation fair and safe for all students. In fact, surveys from GLSEN's 2021 National School Climate Survey and the Human Rights Campaign's 2022 Youth Report show that a majority of students across the U.S. support their transgender peers' inclusion in school activities, including sports. The Maine I know protects its children, not singles them out for exclusion.

Research shows that transgender students who are affirmed in their identities are significantly less likely to suffer from depression and attempt suicide. According to GLSEN, participation in school sports contributes to higher academic achievement and stronger feelings of belonging; we are talking about children's lives.

Thank you for letting me share my perspective with the Committee. If a bill singles out and excludes a group of children from basic school life, it doesn't matter how it's framed, it is discriminatory. I urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on this bill.

Sincerely,

Helen Cohen

