

Melinda Copel
Lubec, Maine
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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee;

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my testimony to the Committee. My name is Melinda Copel, and I live in Lubec. I strongly oppose the bills before the Committee on May 8: LD 233, LD 868, LD 1002, LD 1134, LD 1704, LD 1337, LD 1432, and LD 380.

I am the mother of a transgender son. My son did not come out to his family as transgender until he was in his twenties. He was an excellent student, but he experienced anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation throughout middle school, high school, and his undergraduate years in college, and episodes of self-harm in high school. When he began his transition, his whole outlook changed. Today he is happy and successful, married with a child, and embarking on a career that he loves. He was fortunate to have a supportive family and friends and a supportive school atmosphere.

I feel strongly that we need to take politics out of this discussion. We need to do what is best for all our children, including transgender youth. We know that transgender youth suffer higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide and are more often victims of bullying and violence.

LD 233: I strongly oppose this bill. We need to create a safe and supportive environment for all our students to be able to participate in school sports. Transgender students are entitled to opportunities to participate and compete. Before puberty, students should participate on mixed teams. There is no physical advantage attributed to sex prior to puberty. As an adolescent, I participated in two sports/activities, equestrian sports and dance. Boys and girls trained and competed together. There was no perceived advantage of one sex over the other. Safety and fairness were ensured by sorting students into levels according to their ability.

The requirements for each sport should be examined individually. We should recognize that adolescents grow at different rates and girls generally mature earlier than boys. Height and strength will vary according to a variety of factors. Segregating student athletes by sex may not ensure safety and fairness. I propose that we develop more appropriate criteria for assigning children to sports teams and make available teams at a variety of levels so that all students may participate safely and with success.

LD 868: I strongly oppose this bill. We need to make private changing rooms and showers available for all students. This is not only a transgender issue. Many middle

school and high school students are uncomfortable changing and showering in front of others. Giving students the option of privacy would encourage more students to participate in sports and physical activities.

Gender neutral bathrooms should be available for all students. No transgender student should be forced to use a bathroom that does not match their gender identity and expression. Forcing transgender students to do this will make all students uncomfortable and may incite some students to violence. Ideally, all bathrooms would be converted to be gender neutral.

LD 1002: I strongly oppose this bill. All children deserve the respect to be called by the name or nickname of their choosing. This is not an issue for transgender children only.

LD 1134: I strongly oppose this bill. Denying any students the ability to play sports or to access school facilities is wrong. All children should feel welcome in our schools, and none of them should be denied the opportunity to participate in school activities.

LD 1704: I strongly oppose this bill. See my comments under LD 868.

LD 1337: I strongly oppose this bill. Rolling back anti-discrimination requirements is despicable. If we do this, we will be on the wrong side of history.

LD 1432: I strongly oppose this bill. See my comments under LD 1337.

LD 380: I strongly oppose this bill. Gender-affirming care can ameliorate or prevent depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation that often accompany gender dysphoria. Passage of this bill will increase the effects of gender dysphoria among 16 and 17-year-olds who are denied care and may increase the number of suicides among transgender youth. **One suicide is too many.**

We need to remember that we are talking about children and that transgender girls are not men. They don't look like men, dress like men, act like men, or think like men. Some have taken puberty blockers or undergone medical transition.

I watched my transgender son struggle when we were out in public. He felt uncomfortable using a public bathroom, trying on clothes in a store dressing room, and even shopping for clothes. I don't wish that on any child or any parent.

Thank you for your time.

Melinda Copel