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LD 1002

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

My name is Rev. Marvin Ellison, Ph.D., and I'm a resident of Portland. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony.

I am writing in opposition to this bill.

In offering my comments, I'm wearing three different hats. First, I'm an ordained Presbyterian minister who has had close relationships over the years with transgender youth and adults as well as with their families. Second, I'm an educator. For thirty-five years I served as professor of Christian ethics at Bangor Theological Seminary. Among my former students are several transgender people who are now serving in Christian ministry. Finally, I'm the father of an adult daughter and now grandfather to two amazing granddaughters.

What have I learned in each of these roles?

As a clergyperson, I've learned that transgender persons are beloved of God, fully reflecting the divine image as persons of dignity and worth, and deserving of our respect, care, and protection from discrimination, abuse, and violence of all kinds. God's creation is full of splendid diversity, including diverse gender identities and sexualities, and the proper response to such diversity is amazement and gratitude, not disdain and disrespect and never, ever hostility and violence.

As a theologian and teacher of Christian ethics, I've learned that the community is stronger when it welcomes and treats its diverse members fairly and respectfully, especially its vulnerable members. Throughout the biblical traditions, the community is given two tests about whether things are relatively just and fair not. First, ask how the least powerful, the most vulnerable, and the weakest members of the community are doing. Second, ask if you're willing to trade places. If not, that's a good sign that things are not yet rightly ordered. At this moment, it's the members of the transgender community who are the least powerful, the most vulnerable, and the ones facing hostility and harm from those who fear difference and seek to roll back human and civil rights protections. We need to stand with and for our trans siblings, and we need to stand against incivility, fearmongering, and discrimination.

As a father and grandfather, I have learned that my daughter and granddaughters are deeply grateful for their trans friends and do not feel threatened by their participation in sports or in other aspects community life. In fact, they are appalled, as I am, that a zealous few have targeted trans people, and especially trans youth, for ridicule, discrimination, and disrespect, supposedly in the name of "protecting women's rights." However, the truth of the matter is that transgender girls are girls, and transgender women are women. They should be respected, cared for, and treated fairly as all other female members of our society should be. Trans rights are, indeed, human rights to be honored and protected.

I urge you to oppose any legislation that would prevent our schools, our sports teams, and our community at large from providing safety, respect, and protection for transgender youth (and adults) and from securing the kind of environment in which each and every Mainer can thrive. These days the best test of how well we're doing on this score is, again, seeing how our trans members are doing.