

Avery Friend
Portland
LD 1432

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Avery Friend, I'm a Portland resident, and I'm here with the organization MaineTransNet. I'm here today in opposition to the bills before the committee.

As a woman who's centered my advocacy in allyship with the trans community over the last eight years, I've been asked so many times why that is—I'm cisgender, didn't know any openly trans people until I was an adult, and while this has since changed, I didn't have any close trans friends or family members when I began focusing on trans issues in 2017. My answer in those earlier years was quite simple: I grew up in the deep south, and while much of the country and some fellow members of the queer community believed that the cultural battle to normalize and legalize same-gender relationships and queerness in general had been won, I was surrounded by people that I knew would never give in to that. And those people started talking a lot about trans people in 2016, before and following Trump's first administration.

They didn't give up. They shifted targets, selecting an even smaller and more vulnerable group to throw their weight against. It was very clear, even then, that the strategy to center trans people and stir up a culture of fear, was both a test—how far can they get moderates and liberals to bend? — and an opening salvo. They wouldn't, and won't, stop with trans people.

I moved to Maine in part because it was safer for me, as a queer disabled woman, than staying in Louisiana. And yet here we are, discussing whether or not to remove "gender identity" as a protected class in the Maine Human Right's Act twenty years after it was enacted. This is singularly outrageous and unacceptable, but also terrifying, because the inevitable question is: who's next?

So far this year I've spent thousands of dollars out of pocket for healthcare, two men froze to death less than a mile from the empty apartment next door to me, and many of my queer loved ones are trying to flee the south because their lives are in danger. It infuriates and scares me that we're sitting here in Maine talking about violating both the state and federal constitutional guarantees of equal protection and stripping some of the most vulnerable members of our communities of those protections—including people facing harm that need and deserve safe places to seek shelter, and trans kids who are watching every day as a loud minority of our country shames, stigmatizes, delegitimizes, and bullies them. Doing so would reward the federal government's bullying tactics and open the door for further attacks on Mainers' civil rights. And if we give in even an inch on any human rights, the country and the Trump administration is watching and waiting to see who's next and what else they can get away with.

The quote says "As Maine goes, so goes the nation." Equally, I want to be very clear: "As trans rights go, so go all human rights."

Thank you very much.