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

Thank you, Senators, for taking the time to read this testimony. My name is Mallory Haar and I'm a resident of Portland. I want to express strong opposition for the bills before the committee today.

I am a proud educator in Portland Public Schools, and have worked there for the past 15 years. I am a strong believer that our public schools are one of the most critical institutions for creating and sustaining a truly pluralistic society and healthy democracy. My colleagues across the state work every day to equip our students with both the academic skills and the civil and social consciousness to participate meaningfully in their communities. Part of this ethos, perhaps the most important part, is the idea that we must all work to create communities in which all people feel safe and respected. I believe there isn't a school in Maine that doesn't work to explicitly teach and model these values.

And yet, research from last year shows that nearly 60% of Maine's LGBTQ+ students have experienced discrimination based on their identities; a whopping 38% have considered suicide in the last year (as reported in the Portland Press Herald on March 7, 2024). This is a staggering number of kids: 1 in 7 students in Maine are LGBTQ+. Trans students, while a smaller subset of this population, face even more sobering predicted health and mental health outcomes.

The proposed bills are animated by a dubious notion of trans students having unfair athletic advantage. Proponents of the bill cite differences in the physical abilities between "biological" males vs. females, but I have yet to encounter any compelling evidence to substantiate the claim that trans athletes are somehow dominating youth sports to the detriment of their cisgender peers in Maine. In my experience, trans teen athletes are no different from the larger pool of student athletes: a few are exceptional but most are middle of the pack. Even entertaining the argument that trans students' involvement in sports is somehow denying human rights to other students raises the question — what is the point of publicly-funded youth sports anyway? I would offer that youth sports should be an extension of the larger educational project of making functional, collaborative communities.

The recent uptick in anti-trans rhetoric from our federal administration is foremost an attempt to cleave apart the social cohesion that makes our school communities, and thus our democracy, strong. It is targeting a population that is already most likely to be marginalized. History has already taught us what happens when we capitulate to these pressures. I believe Maine is stronger than this. We must increase our support for trans students, not diminish it.

Thank you for reading. I urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on these bills. Thank you.

Respectfully,
Mallory Haar