

Rikki Hallax
Freeport
LD 1002

Testimony LD 1002:

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Freeport, ME
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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Rikki Hallax, I am a resident of Freeport, and I am writing in opposition of LD 1002: "An Act to Protect Children's Identification by Requiring Public Schools to Use the Name and Gender Specified on a Child's Birth Certificate".

In middle school, I had a best friend named Jay who is a cisgender male. Jay was not the name given to him at birth. He asked teachers and friends to call him Jay rather than his legal first name due to a discomfort with his given name. It doesn't matter the reason why. It was simple: the name caused discomfort, so he kindly asked to be called a different name that made him comfortable. How many people do we know that choose to go by their middle or last name, or maybe a nickname? I personally know many, all for slightly different reasons. It may be that it sounds better or is easier to spell. It may be because they share a name with their dad and it's easier to be called "Nick". It could be any reason. A transgender student using a preferred name that aligns with their gender identity is just another reason. Does an educator using a preferred name or different pronoun for a child disrupt the class? Does it impact the curriculum? I can imagine it certainly does not. Any person, minor persons included, have the right to identify themselves the way that they are comfortable. I am struggling to understand the necessity for such a bill when it has little to no impact on the classroom environment, the child's ability to learn, or the teacher's ability to teach.

My name has been changed legally and I am so happy that it has. Now every email, every letter, every bank, or account reflects my chosen name and puts a big smile on my face. Not only does my name align with my gender identity, it also has meaningful significance to me, something that my birth name never had. Just like my friend Jay, my given name didn't feel quite right. As a medical professional of 8 years, I had patients that reported being misgendered, feeling mistreated, and unsafe when a doctor, nurse, or other medical staff used the wrong name or denied them an option to submit a preferred name on their medical chart. A birth name is attached to an identity that no longer belongs to them, and any reference to it thereafter can be incredibly distressing for some individuals. They feel invalidated and unseen. Hearing one's dead name or being misgendered can inflict feelings of anxiety, gender dysphoria, a lack of acceptance and, depending on the situation, can make one fearful for their safety. Dealing with deadnaming can lead to chronic stress from worrying about acceptance and/or safety, avoidance of certain people or places, depression, low self-worth, and suicidal ideation. In an educational environment, this could very well lead to decreases in class participation, focus, and overall success with testing and comprehension of studies.

In conclusion, choosing to misidentify or misgender a student can have a profound impact on their academic success. This, in turn, could directly influence whether or not a student is eligible for a scholarship program or for participating in recreational activities in the community or at school, as many programs evaluate academics prior to acceptance.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on this bill. Thank you!