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

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. I am writing in opposition of the bills before the committee today.

I have been an educator for more than 20 years, and during that time I have often worked with students who are severely at-risk or in other ways very complex and/or expensive to educate: trauma, extreme poverty, addiction, violence etc. It is the job of schools to educate every student no matter the need, but all teachers know that we often fail, despite every effort and considerable resource, and this is something all of society ultimately pays for in a myriad of ways.

I have also worked with many transgender students in that time. Unlike those listed above, these students were remarkably easy to support and, consequently, to teach: when called by the correct name and pronoun and permitted to participate in the gender role in which they felt most at home (actions that cost nothing) the younger ones walked into class, hung up their backpacks and began to chatter with friends about Lego and Pokémon. The older ones wrote essays, did lab experiments, joined in class discussions. They tackled their lessons like any other solid student, and grew and contributed like any other healthy child.

Those who did not get this often skulked into class, panicked in groups, developed trauma, anxiety, depression, and school resistance, had difficulty trusting peers and adults, struggled with schoolwork, struggled in jobs. In short, they became at-risk youth, complex and expensive to educate, students we failed, statistics all of society paid for. And it was avoidable, easily.

The purpose of a school is to educate students so that they can grow to participate in society. Similarly, the purpose of sports teams – an integral part of school for a majority of youth - is physical exercise, teamwork, friendships, and character-building. As has often been noted when GLBTQ issues arise in connection to school, my job as a teacher is to teach. Keeping the schools' nose out of students' gender roles, as many Maine schools already do, is a cheap/free, easy and already effective way to do our jobs as teachers, coaches, and school personnel so that we can focus on the programming schools are there to deliver.

Doing otherwise inhibits our ability to educate, not just transgender students, but also their peers. The GLBTQ suicide and bullying statistics back this up. As any teacher – and many former students know – a death in a school or alumni community affects everyone. Bullying in a community, no matter who it targets, affects everyone. Shaken students, worried students, students afraid of becoming a target even if they aren't one, learn less, contribute less, succeed less, and the results show throughout a school community – and, ultimately, throughout the wider community, too, as it is made of former students.

This bill places obstacles to student success where none exist currently, and our students – all our students, transgender and not – deserve better. And, highly unusual in the world of potentially at-risk youth, they already have better. Please fight to keep it.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote “Ought not to Pass” on these bills. Thank you!