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Testimony in Opposition to LD 380: *An Act to Amend Certain Laws Regarding Gender-affirming Health Care Services*

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

My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I am a licensed clinical social worker, behavioral health consultant, and educator with over 25 years of experience working with youth, families, and communities across the state of Maine. I am here today to express my strong opposition to LD 380, which seeks to repeal the critical legal protections currently afforded to both patients and providers of reproductive and gender-affirming healthcare in Maine.

At its core, this legislation threatens to dismantle Maine's Shield Law and repeal aspects of current laws around consent for medical care by minors. This legislation, passed in 2024 as LD 227 and enacted by Public Law 2023, chapter 648, provides an essential safeguard that ensures our state remains a safe and accessible place for individuals seeking medically necessary and legally protected care, including reproductive and gender-affirming services. Repealing these protections would not only undermine the autonomy and dignity of patients, but it would also create an environment of fear and legal uncertainty for providers simply doing their jobs.

As a behavioral health clinician, I have worked directly with many trans and non-binary youth and their families. I have witnessed the life-saving impact that gender-affirming care can have on mental health, emotional well-being, and long-term safety. Research is clear: access to gender-affirming healthcare correlates with lower rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among transgender and nonbinary individuals. Removing the legal protections that support this care places young people, especially those already vulnerable to discrimination, at even greater risk.

Furthermore, Maine's Shield Law ensures that providers are not subject to punitive actions or frivolous legal threats from out-of-state jurisdictions seeking to criminalize care that is legal, ethical, and evidence-based. Without these protections, providers may be forced to choose between the care their patients need and the possibility of costly litigation or professional risk.

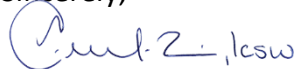
This undermines Maine's public health system, worsens our state's current provider shortages, and endangers our commitment to equitable access to care.

Let me be clear: the Shield Law does not compel anyone to seek or provide care. It simply affirms that those who *do* provide or receive care legally protected in the State of Maine can do so without interference from hostile laws outside our borders. It is about upholding Maine's sovereignty, our healthcare system, and our values of compassion, dignity, and respect.

Repealing these protections would send a chilling message to trans and non-binary Mainers, to women and people who can become pregnant, to providers, and to all who believe that healthcare decisions belong between patients and their medical teams, not in political crossfire.

I urge you to reject LD 380 with a clear "Ought Not to Pass" and uphold Maine's Shield Law protections. We must continue to protect safe access to gender-affirming and reproductive healthcare and stand firmly against efforts to roll back the rights of our neighbors and communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Z. McLaughlin, LCSW". The signature is stylized with a large "C" and "M".

Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW
Owner and Lead Consultant
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References:

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2024/>