

Emily Pines  
Portland  
LD 1134

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Portland, Maine  
May 6th, 2025

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

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. My name is Emily Pines. I'm a resident of Portland Maine.

I am writing in opposition to the bills before the committee today.

Along with being a parent and having participated heavily in the community and school environments of my own 2 children, I have dedicated my career to working with, understanding and advocating for youth as a licensed mental health therapist. I have worked with youth in the community and as a therapist embedded within schools for the past 10 plus years. My experience makes it clear to me that these bills will cause real harm and emotional damage to already vulnerable young people.

Adolescence is a time for identity formation. The questions of "who am I" often emerge. This identity formation is a process and allowing kids to explore this creates healthy, well adjusted adults. Often, kids in middle school will go by a nickname- which helps them to feel seen and understood as to who they are. By Clamping down on this and creating policy to disallow it- by overpowering kids' ability to self identify, we are using punitive measures to raise our collective youth. Our youth are smart, emotionally aware and kind (they also support each other). Allowing this freedom to self identify helps kids to more deeply understand what they need. By controlling this faction, this will suppress understanding of who they are.

if this bill passes, it will cause emotional distress to children and adolescents who just want to get through a day at school in a supported environment (they are not asking for any type of "special privilege". They really just want to exist and be "seen" for who they are. Not being able to use the bathroom that fits with their gender identity and not being able to go by a nickname will create unneeded distractions for them and emotional barriers that impact learning.

(As an aside, some of these kids are living their lives as the gender that they connect with and their peers and friends support their identity.)

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!"