

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Jaye Rich (she/her). I serve on the Auburn School Committee, I'm treasurer of the Maine Education Association, and I teach multilingual learners at McMahon Elementary in Lewiston. I'm here today to express my views against LD 1432, An Act to Remove Consideration of Gender Identity from the Maine Human Rights Act.

As a teacher, I'd like to share a little history to explain how we got here today. Since 2005, Maine has recognized gender identity under the Maine Human Rights Act, initially within the definition of sexual orientation. In 2019, lawmakers clarified the law by providing a distinct definition of gender identity, and in 2021, they explicitly prohibited discrimination on that basis. Gender identity protections ensure that individuals are not discriminated against in employment, housing, education, public accommodations, or credit based on their identity.

Removing these protections would mark a significant reversal in civil rights for transgender and nonbinary individuals.

Transgender and nonbinary individuals face high rates of discrimination, which leads to high suicide, self-harm, and homelessness rates in our communities, especially in our youth. When people are protected by law, they are more likely to feel safe, supported, and able to thrive. Removing protections sends a dangerous message of exclusion and may increase hostility or violence.

It's also important to recognize that efforts to remove gender identity protections often rely on fear-based rhetoric and misinformation, especially around issues such as school bathrooms, sports, or safety, despite no credible evidence supporting these fears. Such narratives dehumanize transgender and nonbinary people, framing them as threats rather than our neighbors, students, coworkers, and family members.

The Maine Human Rights Act should be based on **facts and fairness**, not panic or prejudice. It is our responsibility to protect people's rights, not score political points through division and fear.

Thank you for your time and representing the great state of Maine.