

Rabbi Jared H. Saks
Portland, Maine
May 8, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Rabbi Jared H. Saks and I am a resident of Portland. I serve as the spiritual leader of Congregation Bet Ha'am in South Portland, Maine's largest synagogue, serving roughly 1000 members throughout southern and midcoast Maine. I am here in opposition to the bills before the committee today, specifically this afternoon LD 380.

In Jewish tradition, human dignity and the preservation of life are the highest values. Protecting human dignity takes precedence in Judaism over fulfilling most other religious obligations. Human dignity is rooted in Genesis 1:27, which teaches that each of us is created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God. When that same verse says that God created humanity male and female, it doesn't mean *only* male and female any more than the Bible's saying God created night and day means that God didn't create dusk, dawn, or twilight. This is a simple literary device called a merism, where two opposing parts indicate the breadth of the whole. Think about when you last misplaced your keys or your phone. You looked near and far, but not *only* near and far, but obviously everywhere in between. Otherwise, you probably would still be searching.

Jewish tradition's support for transgender people is rooted in these values, that human dignity is paramount and that our diversity is a testament to God's greatness and power. LD 380 would not only put unnecessary strain on our already burdened healthcare system here in Maine, it would also violate the human dignity of medical professionals and trans and non-binary youth seeking appropriate medical care without which their lives would be at risk.

Jewish communities like Congregation Bet Ha'am firmly believe that all people deserve to be treated with dignity, to have the spark of the divine within them supported and nurtured. We support transgender people's rights because of our Jewish values, not in spite of them. For all these reasons, I urge you to oppose LD 380.