

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee and share my perspective. My name is Eleanor Schuttenberg, and I am a resident of Bangor. I am writing in opposition of LD1704. I am a PhD candidate in clinical psychology, specializing in working with children. As a part of this training, I work with children and adolescents who feel depressed, who feel anxious, and many of whom struggle with suicidal thoughts. Many of the youth I work with identify as transgender, non-binary, gender fluid, or are in the process of figuring out their own gender identity. While I have seen considerable joy from these youth, I have sat with youth as they have cried because they feel rejected, I have watched them avoid school because they feel as though there is no place for them, and I have witnessed them feel crushed by the laws and politics of our country telling them that they shouldn't exist. Children as young as nine years old have told me that if they cannot be who they are, if they cannot be the gender they know themselves as, that their only option is suicide. In those moments, as their therapist, I am there for them. I create a safe space for them in my office where they know they have rights, dignity, autonomy, and respect. But when these transgender youth leave my office, they feel the rest of the world trying to punish and erase them. I fear for them as they leave, but I take solace knowing that despite living in a country that stigmatizes them, Maine currently supports their rights.

As a PhD candidate, much of my life is spent reading scientific literature. I spend my time reading studies to try to be the most informed scientist, the best therapist, and the best advocate I can be for the children who walk into my office. And what the science tells us is what we already know: transgender and gender diverse people exist. Transgender people are not harmful. There is no evidence that allowing transgender youth to play on their gender-aligned sports teams hurts anyone. There is no evidence allowing children to use the restroom that aligns with their gender identity puts anyone in danger. There is no evidence that allowing a child to use their chosen name is harmful to anyone. Elite athletes can still get benefits of sport with transgender people around them. The bathrooms in Maine are safe when everyone is able to use them.

Transgender people, and transgender youth specifically, are acutely harmed by anti-trans legislation. Anti-transgender legislation can increase suicide attempts by up to 72%. One transgender person I worked with described that these anti-trans laws feel like "water on a stone" – one drop doesn't look like a lot, but over time they erode a person's sense of wellbeing and safety. Gender-affirming legislation and care saves the lives of children, adolescents, and adults. Our government has a responsibility to help remind people- all people- that they are safe from discrimination. Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective with the Committee. I urge you to vote "Ought not to Pass" on LD1704. Thank you for your time.