

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

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee.

My name is Kristen Shackelford, and I am writing to you as a resident of Appleton, a licensed occupational therapist who has worked in Maine public schools for nearly a decade, and—most personally—as the parent of a teenage daughter and also a young adult who is transgender. I am submitting this written testimony in strong opposition to LD 868.

As both a parent and a professional who has worked closely with students across a wide range of backgrounds and abilities, I know how crucial it is that our schools create supportive, safe, and inclusive environments for every child. Transgender and gender-diverse students already face disproportionately high rates of discrimination, bullying, and mental health challenges. According to the 2022 U.S. National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health conducted by The Trevor Project, 45% of LGBTQ youth seriously considered suicide in the past year, with transgender and nonbinary youth reporting even higher rates of anxiety, depression, and suicide attempts than their peers. They do not need their lives to be more difficult than they already are. Feeling valued and included is essential to mental health.

Supporters of LD 868 claim it is about ensuring safety and fairness—especially for women and girls. But this argument is not supported by evidence. There is no credible data suggesting that transgender girls and women pose a threat to the safety of cisgender girls and women. In fact, policies like this create confusion, stigma, and new risks for all students, particularly girls. If we begin legislating who is "woman enough" to participate in public life—whether in sports, pageants, or school activities—we are opening the door to invasive scrutiny and harmful verification practices that threaten the dignity of *all* girls and women, not just those who are transgender.

We've already seen examples of this here in Maine. When the first openly transgender woman was recently announced as a participant in the Miss Maine competition—a contest with no physical or athletic advantage—public commenters on news reports still insisted she should be excluded. This reveals that the issue is not fairness or safety. It's about who is allowed to exist openly and fully in public life.

The Maine Constitution guarantees that "*No person shall be deprived of life, liberty or property without due process of law, nor be denied the equal protection of the laws.*" (Article I, Section 6-A). LD 868 would violate this foundational promise. By singling out transgender youth and imposing barriers to their inclusion and well-being, the bill is fundamentally discriminatory and unconstitutional.

Furthermore, this bill reflects a disturbing trend seen in other states, where national political agendas are targeting trans youth to score ideological points. Maine must reject this approach. We are a state that values fairness, compassion, and local control. We must not allow our public policy to be shaped by misinformation or fear.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and for your thoughtful consideration of this deeply important issue. I urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on LD 868 and to continue protecting the rights and dignity of all Maine students.

Sincerely,

Kristen Shackelford

Appleton, Maine