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LD 1134

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

Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee. My name is Mia Shifrin, I'm a resident of Weld, Maine, and am writing in opposition to the beliefs before the committee regarding the series of bills aimed to limit the rights and humanity of students who are transgender.

Most of my life has been influenced and dictated by sports—this is the place where I both grew the most as a person and was challenged the most as an adolescent. This love for sports has led me to work in outdoor education, guiding canoe trips as well as a ski coach, while I pursue my masters in social work. I continue to marvel at the resilience, joy, friendship, and fun that these spaces foster for young people. This summer I had the pleasure of leading a two week canoe trip on the Allagash where almost all participants were queer or trans—an un-intentional grouping. On the trip, I marveled at how authentically each of these young people navigated the world, their joy, their compassion for others, and the never-ending support they gave each other and found within the group of people (this is not typically my experience with these trips). Many of the skills each of these individuals brought to the trip had foundations in sports or other team experiences (debate, theatre, robotics club, etc) that these young people participated in and where they found an immense sense of belonging. I recall one day speaking with one participant about sports and his sadness that he couldn't ever "be good at soccer" because of his size (he was a trans boy), but he had found rock climbing where he was a strong member of their team and it was where "all his real friends were". I asked him pointedly if he thought his rock climbing made him better at canoeing, and he honestly responded with a reflection about how he was good at tying knots, but that it didn't help him except for when he needed extra patience with his boat partner. This patience, he told me, reminded him of the patience he needed when navigating a challenging climb or working with his belay partner—skills that no challenging math test or English class discussing *The Great Gatsby* could ever really teach.

The bills before the committee today would significantly limit this child's ability to continue to be his authentic self in the world where he feels safe in schools, extracurricular activities, and amongst his peers—an ability we would never DARE to intentionally take away from a cis girl or boy. Trans youth are 3 times more likely to experience housing insecurity, 38% of queer youth had considered suicide within the past year, 71% of LGBTQ+ youth reported feelings of depression and anxiety, 72% of trans youth reported feelings of depression and anxiety, and 23% of these youth experienced physically threatened or harmed as a result of their identity. (The Trevor Project 2024)

Together, these bills present a world wherein young people are not welcome to be their true authentic selves, their basic humanity is denied as they are not allowed to be themselves, and more harm is being done to young people who are up against insurmountable challenges that range from climate disaster to global political instability to crippling social inequality, respected, and their basic human right to be authentically themselves is limited.

Passing these bills aimed at harming queer youth sets a precedent for other bills which condone other forms of gender based violence—such as the one in session this afternoon aimed at removing all references to "gender identity" as a protected class in the Maine Human Rights Act. Are bathrooms and youth sports worth fighting over? Is bullying or traumatizing young people over their appearance and identity worthwhile? How do these create supportive environments? Who do these bills aim to protect? How does this promote individual agency and privacy? And really, would you wish this on your child, sibling, friend?

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
Mia Shifrin