

Debra C. Susi
61 Pierce Street
Gardiner, ME 04345
May 8th, 2025

To: Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee

My name is Debra Susi. I am a 38-year educator, the 2022 Somerset County Teacher of the Year and semifinalist for the 2023 Maine State Teacher of the Year. In that time, I've taught thousands of students—students from all walks of life, each deserving of dignity, safety, belonging — young people who are trying to find their way in a complicated world. Some of them are LGBTQ+. Some of them come from homes where they don't feel safe. All of them deserve to be treated with dignity.

I'm here today to speak against LD 1337 because I believe it would make Maine less safe for some of our most vulnerable people.

Section 1 of the bill would allow certain emergency shelters—private ones—to legally turn people away based on who they are, particularly transgender women. These are often people in crisis, fleeing violence or abuse. Denying them shelter based on gender identity is not only discriminatory—it's dangerous.

This isn't just about theory. I've had students who needed shelter. Some were LGBTQ+ youth who were kicked out of their homes. If they had been turned away at a critical moment, I don't know what would have happened to them. That's what's at stake here.

The rest of the bill raises more concerns. It expands exemptions for religious institutions in ways that could deny students, job seekers, or shelter residents fair treatment. And it misuses Title IX—federal law that already protects female athletes—to create more space for discrimination under the guise of fairness.

As a teacher, I know we can respect both religious liberty and civil rights. We don't have to choose one at the expense of the other. But this bill doesn't strike that balance—it tips the scale in the wrong direction.

Maine should be a place where everyone feels safe and welcome, especially in moments of crisis. Please do not turn back the clock on the protections that so many have fought for.

I respectfully urge you to vote **no** on this bill. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debra C. Susi". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.