

Ballot Initiative, LD 2239 Statement

Tobin Del Cuore

Resident of Norway, Maine

I was born and raised in Norway. I went to Guy E. Rowe Elementary School, then Oxford Hills Junior High and Oxford Hills Comprehensive High School through my Sophomore year. I didn't graduate from Oxford Hills because I got the opportunity to attend an arts high school in Natick, Massachusetts, to begin my serious dance training. This was one of the greatest things to ever happen to me.

Since leaving Maine at 15, I lived in the Boston suburbs, New York City, Chicago, and, throughout my career, I got the opportunity to travel the world. I have always come back to Norway because my folks still live here and it will always be my home.

Recently, my spouse and I acquired a home in Norway, and we spend as much time in Maine as we can. I'm happy to be back. I love Maine. I love where I grew up. That is why I'm writing this.

I am a 47-year-old white cisgender homosexual male. The journey to a place of strength and confidence in who I am has been a long one; I'm still working at accepting and understanding myself.

Self-acceptance is commonly a part of the individual human condition, but many queer people struggle with it in a more substantial way or for a long period of their lives. This has been my experience.

I have struggled with shame. Shame for being gay. Shame for not being "normal." Shame for something I had no choice in being. Shame is a terrible thing. It can lead to many other issues and haunt a person for the rest of their life. The shame I learned to feel as a child because of my nature still haunts me today.

It can be hard to say where this idea of shame came from. I do recall being discouraged from acting in a flamboyant manner. I recall being told that other little boys didn't dress up like I was inclined to, that other boys weren't drawn to playing with dolls or doing their mother's hair like I was. But there was also something deeper. I had the realization that I was born the wrong gender, that I was a girl in a boy's body.

I really don't know where this idea and feeling came from. It was something pure and natural, and not from any outside source, but even so, at the time, I had the idea that it was wrong. I already knew from the world I saw around me and from the things that were said to me that my flamboyance was "wrong." I also definitely knew that my gender mix-up was also "wrong." I knew that the world outside wouldn't understand, and I wondered how I could live my life like this. I considered ending my life. There didn't seem to be any other way out of the situation. I had no one to talk to. I knew my parents loved me, but I didn't think they would understand, so I kept it all inside.

Obviously, I didn't take any action to end my life as a young child. The thing that saved me was the love I felt around me. Even though they didn't know what was going on, and even though I didn't feel I could talk to them, I knew that my parents loved me. I decided that I couldn't leave them, and I determined there

had to be a way through this, even if I didn't know what it was. I would find a way. I can't imagine what would have happened if I had been born into a household where there wasn't enough love and support.

When I was 16, before officially coming out to my family, I got the opportunity to leave home and go to a private arts school to further my dance training. When I got there, I quickly realized that many students at the school were queer just like me. In a matter of a few months, I went from a closeted, shy, shame-ridden teenager to an out, expressive one, exploring a social landscape I could barely ever have dreamed of. Being away from home gave me the space to explore who I was in so many respects, outside the restraints of a community where I had to hide. I've seen a few videos of myself from that time, and I barely recognize the person I was then. I was so free, happy and hopeful. It was a beautiful thing to see.

The gender dysphoria I felt as a child lasted into my early 20's and has since dissipated. Those feelings at that time of my life were real, but as I grew as a man, I became more and more comfortable in the gender I was born with. This is obviously not the case for everyone who has these experiences. Nowadays, the option of identifying as non-binary is available. I wonder what I would have done if I had had that option.

I have my dance career to thank for helping me become a better male human. In the kind of dance training and work I did, there is little room to hide. As dancers, we spend years dissecting our physical selves. Dancers also interact constantly in such physically intimate situations that there is no choice but to learn an expansive regard for other humans. We come in all shapes and sizes, from diverse life experiences and regard for the world around us. I am grateful to have had these profound professional experiences that have enriched my personal life and my relationships with those around me.

All of this said, the opportunity to feel safe and understood when I first left home was a game-changer for me. As a young person, I did not feel safe or understood in my hometown community. I knew that most people wouldn't accept who I was. I had to leave my community to find a place where I feel safe and understood. I am not alone in this situation. It should not be this way. We should be making Maine a safe place for ALL our children, including LGBTQ+ identifying children, to grow and flourish.

Gender dysphoria can cause more harm than just a lack of self-confidence or shame. It can easily lead to deep self-hatred and feeling trapped, the only answer for some being self-harm. No child should be put into this position.

I deeply oppose ballot initiative LD 2239. It is a threat to LGBTQ+ youngsters and, in particular, trans or gender questioning kids. This initiative is saying that these kids shouldn't be allowed to be themselves, that they must conform to the binary system. This is wrong. This initiative protects no one.

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