



SUIT UP MAINE

May 5, 2021

Sen. Carney, Rep. Harnett, and Honorable members of the Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Kelli Whitlock Burton and I am a resident of Waldoboro. I offer this testimony in opposition to LD 1238, “An Act To Authorize Shelters That Serve Women To Refuse Access to Persons Who Are Transgender,” on behalf of Suit Up Maine, an independent, all-volunteer constituent action group representing more than 5,000 Mainers in all 16 counties.

People who find themselves in need of emergency shelter are in crisis, a situation all too familiar to transgender people, who are at significantly greater risk for intimate partner violence¹ and homelessness.² Under this bill, trans girls and women who desperately need shelter could be denied that path to safety, based on a false claim that trans women are predators. It’s a tired stereotype that has no more foundation in fact today than it did when it was used 50 years ago against Black men as a defense for racial segregation.

Trans people are not a new phenomenon. They have utilized restrooms and locker rooms, and, yes, emergency shelters that align with their gender identity for decades, without any evidence of increased violence or compromised public safety.³ Sexual assault prevention advocates and domestic violence organizations have rejected the type of discrimination against transgender people that this bill perpetuates, including seven organizations here in Maine.⁴ Sen. Keim claimed, in a social media broadcast earlier this week, that these organizations are being “held hostage” by progressives and risk persecution if they back a proposal such as hers. As a former volunteer for a domestic violence crisis center in Lincoln County, I can assure you that those who work

¹ Peitzmeier SM, Malik M, Kattari SK, Marrow E, Stephenson R, Agénor M, Reisner SL. Intimate Partner Violence in Transgender Populations: Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Prevalence and Correlates. *Am J Public Health*. 2020 Sep;110(9):e1-e14. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2020.305774. Epub 2020 Jul 16. PMID: 32673114. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32673114/>

² 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. <https://www.ustranssurvey.org/reports>

³ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13178-018-0335-z>

⁴ National Consensus Statement of Anti-Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Organizations in Support of Full and Equal Access for the Transgender Community. 2018 April 13. <https://bit.ly/33qbG69>

with people in crisis would never jeopardize the safety of those they serve simply because it would be politically expedient to do so. To suggest otherwise reveals what many of us already know to be true: The bills before you today aren't about shelters or sports. They are part of a documented, national attack on transgender rights that has spawned more than 100 bills in at least 33 states to strip trans people of their civil rights, health care, and self-determination. These attacks have been coordinated by a coalition of anti-LGBTQ groups, including a known hate group called Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF). The sponsors of these bills in Maine can hardly claim to be ignorant of that fact. Sen. Keim, herself, has signed onto a national campaign sponsored by ADF in support of legislation that targets transgender children and adults.⁵ Legislation such as LD 1238.

We cannot allow this national campaign of intolerance and hate to get a foothold in Maine or to allow legislation such as this to blow a hole through Maine's Human Rights Act, opening the door for private emergency shelters to discriminate against anyone, for any reason. Maine is better than that. I urge you to reject this bill with a unanimous Ought Not to Pass.

Thank you.

Kelli Whitlock Burton
Co-Leader, Suit Up Maine

⁵ Signers of the Promise, "Promise to America's Children."
<https://promisetoamericaschildren.org/for-policy-makers/>