



May 6, 2021

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, with a focus on the most marginalized populations and communities.

We write today **in opposition to LD 1401, "An Act To Prohibit Biological Males from Participating in School Athletic Programs and Activities Designated for Females at Schools That Receive Federal Funding" and LD 926: "An Act To Ban Biological Males from Participating in Women's Sports."**

Both bills purport to protect female athletes by excluding transgender girls and young women from sports – but both fall far short of addressing the challenges girls and women actually face. There are a number of high-profile recent cases of girls experiencing harassment and abuse in sporting events - most appallingly the case of Dr. Larry Nassar, who systematically abused athletes on the women's Olympic gymnastics team for decades. Additionally, we see how women's collegiate and professional teams are devalued and undercompensated. The U.S. women's soccer team has won four Olympic gold medals, three World Cups, and is ranked No. 1 in the world, yet they are paid just over one-third of what the men's team (with no recent medals or cups) receives.

On the other hand, there are very few transgender women in competitive collegiate sports (about 50 out of 200,000 athletes)¹, and there is no evidence that they dominate their events². These bills would also ban transgender girls from participating on elementary, middle, and high school teams with their peers, denying them opportunities to develop leadership, discipline, and self-confidence.

This bill does not protect women and girls. Women and girls are not protected by excluding transgender women and girls: all women, cis and trans both, are protected by creating environments free of abuse, supporting and compensating them fairly, and promoting their successes equally.

This legislative push is so disappointing because it is not about solving a local problem or addressing harm that real Mainers are experiencing. It is part of a national trend to promote trans-hostile legislation as a wedge issue. While we debate bills without a real connection to what Mainers are experiencing, the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey tells us that girls in our communities are more likely to experience sexual harassment and violence and to have serious mental health needs, while transgender youth are almost twice as likely to consider

¹ New York Times. (2021). [How Some States Are Moving to Restrict Transgender Women in Sports.](#)

² NPR. (2021). [Wave Of Bills To Block Trans Athletes Has No Basis In Science, Researcher Says.](#)



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suicide than their peers.³ Young people of every gender identity need to hear from adults that they are valued, and to receive mental health care as well as the racial, gender, and economic justice that they deserve. We need to focus our energy on supporting youth, not creating false divisions and distractions.

Sports are an opportunity for young people to build connections and a sense of belonging. For girls especially, who are more likely to experience mental health challenges or to struggle with body image, team sports can be a confidence builder and a refuge. A blanket exclusion would keep trans girls out and to deny them these experiences, further marginalizing these community members, and teaching their peers that exclusion is acceptable. This is not in keeping with the values of youth sports. Discrimination based on gender also goes against the spirit of Title IX, which has protected the right of equal access to the benefits of education and sports since 1972⁴.

As an organization which works to celebrate and expand gender equity, we know that we can build a more equitable future for women and girls by ensuring that all women and girls - including trans women and girls - are part of the team.

We hope you will vote 'ought not to pass' on LD 1401 and LD 926.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
Maine Women's Lobby / mainewomen.org

³ Maine Centers for Disease Control. (2019). [Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey](#).

⁴ "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance."