



January 13, 2022

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is John Hennessy and I am the Director of Public Advocacy for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine and I serve as the co-chair of the Maine Council of Churches Public Policy Committee. I am offering testimony in **opposition** of LD 867 – An Act to Prohibit Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccinations for 5 Years to Allow for Safety Testing and Investigation into Reproductive Harm.

The Episcopal Church has long maintained that we are guided by faith and reason, and that scientific evidence helps us to better understand God’s creation, our place in it, and ways to alleviate suffering and pain. We believe the proper and responsible use of vaccines is a duty not only to our own selves and families but to our communities. Choosing to not vaccinate, when it is medically safe, threatens the lives of others.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a tremendous cross for the whole world to bear. Hundreds of millions have contracted the virus; millions have died. The world has been turned upside down for all of us. Yet light has appeared at the end of the tunnel in the form of the vaccines.

The Episcopal Church supports vaccine access and equity. In 2019 Executive Council approved [a resolution](#) calling for stronger government mandates to ensure all Americans receive inoculations against preventable diseases. The resolution reads in part “... the proper and responsible use of vaccines is a duty not only to our own selves and families but to our communities. Choosing to not vaccinate, when it is medically safe, threatens the lives of others.”

We express grave concern and sorrow for the recent rise in easily preventable diseases due to anti-vaccination movements which have harmed thousands of children and adults nationally and here in Maine.

The leadership of the Episcopal Church recognizes no claim of theological or religious exemption from vaccination for our members and reiterates the spirit of General Convention policies that Episcopalians should seek the counsel of experienced medical professionals, scientific research, and epidemiological evidence.

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Our presiding bishop, Michael Curry, has urged all religious leaders to support evidence-based measures that ensure the strongest protections for our communities. We instruct all of our congregations and dioceses, "to partner with medical professionals to counter false information, and to become educated about programs in their communities that can provide vaccinations and immunizations at reduced or no cost to those in need."

The Maine Council of Churches notes the strong voice of Pope Francis calling on everyone to receive the Covid vaccinations. Noting the vaccines effectiveness against serious illness from covid viruses, he stated "It is therefore important to continue the effort to immunize the general population as much as possible".

Expressing sadness at deep ideological divisions in our world, the Pope noted these divisions as a reason many refrain from being vaccinated. "Frequently people let themselves be influenced by the ideology of the moment, often bolstered by baseless information or poorly documented facts," he said. "Vaccines are not a magical means of healing, yet surely they represent, in addition to other treatments that need to be developed, the most reasonable solution for the prevention of the disease."

In previous statements, Pope Francis has called being vaccinated "an act of love" and "Getting vaccinated is a simple yet profound way to care for one another, especially the most vulnerable."

The Episcopal Church and the Maine Council of Churches opposes passage of this legislation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John Hennessy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".