

To Whom it May Concern:

I am testifying in support of L.D. 51, L.D. 869, L.D. 1098, L.D. 1148, L.D. 1209, and L.D. 1228. Since LD 798 has gone into effect, our family has experienced significant stressors. In our household, both parents work and run businesses. We have been doing our best to homeschool our children using online programs. We have had to hire babysitters to watch our children, and childcare can be very difficult to find in our rural area. While homeschooling can be very successful for some, it is not the best option for our children. Our children have developed low self-esteem and anxiety due to not being allowed to attend their school. Our son, who is 11 years old, struggles with focus and requires a very structured environment for learning. Being homeschooled provides too many distractions for him and this has significantly negatively impacted his self-esteem. Our daughter, who is 9 years old, worries about not being challenged enough and wants to be in school with her peers. She also requires structure and thinks about how this is effecting everyone in our family, which has brought on symptoms of anxiety. Our oldest daughter is 18 years old and wants to work in field of Nursing. She is extremely anxious about the vaccination requirements at universities and in the program/field. We need nurses more than ever and these vaccine mandates are hindering individuals from working in these areas. As parents, we worry about how to make ends meet while making sure our children have a proper education. In today's world, children have enough obstacles to face and LD798 has added an unnecessary burden onto families and children of Maine. Furthermore, LD798 has caused a decrease of enrollment in schools in Maine along with forcing many to look at moving to other states.

We are still stunned at the idea that in the United States of America, our religious freedoms have been stripped in this way. Our children have always attended a private Christian school that we pay tuition for and yet, we have been forced to take them out if we do not comply with vaccines, against our religious beliefs and medical decisions. Mainers should not have to choose between religious freedoms and autonomy over an education. We feel we are being discriminated against due to our religious beliefs and medical decisions. Students with Individualized Education Plans prior to the implementation of LD798 were allowed to stay in school and keep their religious or philosophical exemptions. The government's role is not to make decisions for the people, it is to be a voice for the people and to uphold the constitution. I am urging you to please, adhere to our constitution and stand up for all people of Maine. Your beliefs should not dictate other people's beliefs and medical choices. Restore our religious and philosophical exemptions because it is the right thing to do. At the very least, restore the exemptions for private schools.

Sincerely,  
Melissa & Justin Flewelling