

**Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee,**

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.**

Upon the enactment of LD798, (which removed the right to a religious exemption of certain vaccines to attend a public school) I chose to remove my 2 children from public school. While the masses withdrew due to the Covid Pandemic, we slipped out unnoticed from a modern segregatory law. This law has forever changed the direction of the intentions I once had for our life in Maine. I now homeschool my 3 children, instead of working a dearly loved, difficult to fill, productive job position from which I am greatly missed. I chat with my children about college someday, and in those conversations, I wonder which state we'll be forced to move to in order to have opportunity.

The present laws are a form of modern-day discrimination. Our schools quote, "do not discriminate on the basis of race, age, color, ancestry or national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation or physical or mental disability in admission to, access to, treatment in or employment in its programs and activities." Where once a child was being taught that segregation and discrimination is a thing of the past, and that acceptance and tolerance is the way of the future, and they are quickly seated for a product of their religious sincerity and identity, how would the government try to convince, even a child, but specifically the child violated, that the institutions and the government itself are not in violation of their own policy? So it is with the children and young adults that have been affected by present law forbidding their access to certain institutions. The person is welcomed in every other public domain and yet restricted to access the very institutions trying to teach our next generations what the accepted "right" and "wrong" are.

The side effects of this are exactly what you might think. There is a thick stigma. Both sides of the health institution are feeling it. Doctors are being degraded, seen as common bullies, and patients of religion or sincerity are being blacklisted, and outcasted. Imagine not feeling good enough, or clean enough to just attend a simple school, and then trying to explain it to your best buddies while in a playgroup after school hours.

While the people are restricted, the state wonders where all the workers are, where are all the professionals? Why can't we fill jobs? Where are all the students? Why are our numbers so vastly different than years prior? College students, after being taught to be studious, and to stand by their choices, made a decision with sincerity, and that affected all the numbers in these areas. Are colleges trying to produce leaders or followers? One would think they want driven, sincere, thoughtful, studious, considerate thinkers. Generations of Mainers left the state for homes, jobs, new colleges, and simply education. Should Maine be a place that tells students they can learn anywhere BUT in their schools? Should Maine be proud of its segregation? Does Maine want to be the place people call home? A sanctuary for bullies? Where some children can be left behind?

Personally, I am a raising 8<sup>th</sup> generation Mainers. Maine is the place I'd like to show and tell my great grandchildren all about. Segregation should never be a reason people have to leave a state in this century.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sara Holcombe

