

Jennifer Michaud
Oakland
LD 51

April 3, 2023

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Jennifer Michaud. I am a homeowner in Oakland and I'm married to a lifelong Maine resident. I'm writing in support of LD51. I also support LD869, LD1098, LD1148, LD1209, and LD1228.

I am urging you to restore the philosophical and religious exemptions for school immunizations and consider all options that restore access to education for children across the state.

Over the last 3 years we have seen the mental, physical, emotional, social, educational, and financial impacts of children losing access to the classroom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While most children have been welcomed back into the classroom, those who rely on religious or philosophical exemptions have not. These children and their families are feeling the same effects of being denied access to school: depression, anxiety, loneliness, lower educational achievement, financial hardships.

My family will be greatly impacted if these exemptions are not restored. Our daughter is due to begin kindergarten this fall; she will not meet the immunization requirements for kindergarten and elementary school, and therefore we will be forced to homeschool. No child or family should be banned from accessing our public school systems that we the taxpayers fund. The restoration of exemptions helps children like mine get access to the education they deserve and need.

My husband and I both hold master's degrees and we own a small business in central Maine. We live here – we are part of the community. Our daughter plays with children from the community every day; she is involved in community sports, goes to public libraries and playgrounds, attends the same dance school and gymnastics classes and birthday parties as children in the school system. The idea that public safety is at risk if she attends school next year is nonsensical -- but that is where we are, literally banned from attending school WHILE SOCIALIZING WITH ALL THE SAME CHILDREN.

Our business is the only thing keeping us in Maine at this time. We are planning to homeschool in the short term, but will soon be forced to seek educational opportunities elsewhere. This is a heartbreaking reality for us as we may be forced to SPLIT OUR FAMILY PART-TIME ACROSS TWO STATES, with our educational opportunities being in one state and our business in another.

Religious and philosophical exemptions for immunizations play a crucial role in honoring the individual beliefs and convictions of parents and families. Maine has led the way in striving for diversity and acceptance of individuals and their freedoms, but falls shamefully short in honoring religious and medical freedom. Children should not be ostracized or rejected from classrooms because of their religious or philosophical beliefs. All children have a right to public education. At an absolute MINIMUM, all children should have access to PRIVATE schools, where enrollment is optional.

Restoring religious and philosophical exemptions would allow me and my family to continue to reside in this great state.

I ask that you vote "OUGHT TO PASS" and allow ALL children access to classrooms, loving teachers, school lunches, friendships, school activities, and resources otherwise unattainable. In addition, parents of these children can now work to provide a better financial situation at home. Not supporting this bill puts an unnecessary hardship on families and strips amazing, healthy, energetic, full-of-potential children from all they deserve. I ask you to consider how impactful these pieces of legislation are for families and children all across this state.

These KIDS DO NOT GET TO RE-DO THEIR FORMATIVE YEARS – and YOU have the responsibility today to determine which path their lives are going to take. I would like to see these children be accepted members of society, not the rejected scape goats of the “public health” mantra. School is only 1 of dozens of places where kids interact with one another. You can’t deny that the most important place that children interact is SCHOOL, so let’s be sure all children have the ability to exercise their right to be there.

Sincerely,
Jen Michaud