

Rebekah Shaw
Lewiston
LD 51

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Committee of Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Rebekah Shaw. I am a born and raised Mainer through and through and a resident of Lewiston Maine. My husband Joshua is a special education teacher in Monmouth and former Lewiston educator for years. I am a homeschooling mother to our 4 year old son. I am providing written testimony in support of LD 51, LD 869, LD 1098, LD 1148, LD 1209, and LD 1228 on behalf of our family because we are unable to do so in person.

When LD 798 passed into law it has succeeded in turning our families life upside down. I no longer have the opportunity to work and am now the primary caregiver and educator for our son. Our son has been excluded from receiving much needed occupational therapy and speech therapy through public education. We now have to juggle all his care through private pay and what little insurance covers. With my husband being a special education teacher and our pay being what it is (\$41,000 before taxes, healthcare deduction, and retirement) we have to support a family of three that has a child who needs support for developmental delays on an extremely limited budget. Between inflation and the insane cost of living increase in electrical, gas, food, rent, and everyday needs things are beyond tight. This year alone insurance made it so we had to cut his much needed OT that he needs twice a week and speech therapy twice a week to just one speech session a week because of changes in how many sessions are covered. (We can't afford paying \$420 a week in services out of pocket) Our son is losing three sessions because we are being denied services due to healthcare decisions that were made with our healthcare provider for our child's well-being and deeply held religious convictions through public education. The discrimination is absolutely ridiculous when we should have freedom and respect for our beliefs and freedom of choice for healthcare choices that were made with a healthcare provider regarding unique circumstances with health. And before you think a medical exemption is easy to obtain, let me promise we have tried for two years and our doctor is not able to even though they recommend avoiding vaccines. So now our son faces lifelong delays from not being able to obtaining the early interventions he desperately needed or we face further complications and deterioration in his health if we further vaccinate him. How can we be left with these choices?! So our choices soon will be to either stay in Maine, the only home our family has known close to loved ones or completely uproot our family and move to a state that respects our parental rights and bodily autonomy to choice over medical decisions and rights to special education. Maine will then lose yet another child who isn't fully vaccinated, but also an amazing teacher who has worked tirelessly through years as an Ed tech and a teacher during all of Covid and beyond. The outcome of this discrimination on our family will be long lasting and has only been detrimental. Please consider supporting these bills and reintroduce person freedom and exemptions with respect for people and their personal beliefs.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

Sincerely,

Mrs Rebekah Shaw