

# Maine Chapter

INCORPORATED IN MAINE

American Academy of Pediatrics



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Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan, Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Services, my name is Dr. Laura Blaisdell and I am a resident of South Portland. I am here to testify in opposition of LD51, LD 1098 and LD 1209 as practicing pediatrician, public health expert, a researcher of vaccine hesitancy, a mother and the current president of the Maine American Academy of Pediatrics.

When standing before this committee in 2019 to discuss LD798, my testimony read:

“I implore you to understand this legislation is some of the most important in a life-long dedication to caring for all children...One of the pillared miracles of human health is being pulled down one brick at a time—by its success and by our folly. We must stand together on evidenced and educated ground and know that we will no longer be confused by misinformation. We will make choices for our children that demonstrate to them how immeasurably we value their health and education. We will keep calm with the knowledge that history’s long memory provides evidence on how we must move forward today and through times to come. And with integrity, we will face the considered task of balancing individual and communal responsibilities: for where there are communities, there must be mutual care.”

Sagaciously, this committee, Maine’s legislature and our governor passed LD798 and put it into law in September 2021. Our schools immediately saw improved vaccination rates-- protecting them from outbreaks from 8 vaccine preventable diseases in the midst of a global pandemic that shuttered in-person schooling. I will state here for emphasis and clarification the COVID-19 vaccine was never required for school entry under this law, nor was influenza or HPV.

A referendum allowed for further debate and state-wide public input on Maine’s Vaccine Law— more than 72% of voters, a wide majority in every county, chose to protect public health by eliminating loopholes in our school-ready vaccine laws. After all this effort, did the legislation make schools safer? Yes it did; opt-out rates for vaccination in kindergarten dropped from 6.2% in 2018 to 1.8% in 2021. To my knowledge, there have been no further school outbreaks from these 8 preventable diseases.

During this time as a pediatrician, I counseled undervaccinated families to ensure their children received vaccinations required for school entry in a manner acceptable to them- spacing them out, ordering specific vaccines on request and carefully monitoring my patients. I ensured children who should not receive vaccines had the appropriate medical exemptions so they could attend school. I reassured families that COVID-19, influenza and HPV were not required for school entry. The vast majority of

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undervaccinated families in my practice simply were waiting for some reason to vaccinate-- PL154 became their reason.

I understand for a small minority Maine's Vaccine Law is difficult to accept. Yet when it comes to mutual safety, our right to live the way we want ends when affects the well-being of others. The vast majority of Mainers believe that schools are a part of our communal life where safety is paramount and non-negotiable. Maine's vaccine law was duly debated and decided on these and other merits. LD51, LD 1098 and LD 1209 were brought before this esteemed committee with no new evidence, consideration or new merits to support a re-examination of the law. I strongly urge you to vote ought not to pass on these bills. Thank you once again for your time and consideration of the health of all Maine children.

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