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Testimony in OPPOSITION of LD 51, "An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements"

Good day, Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Lawrence Losey, MD. I am a resident of Harpswell, Maine, a pediatrician in Brunswick, and a long-standing member of the Board of Directors for the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

I regret that my schedule does not enable me to meet with you in person. I have appeared multiple times previously to provide testimony regarding childhood immunizations. For over 25 years, I have been involved with the Maine Immunization Program's work to improve access to childhood immunizations. For the last thirteen years I have been a board member of the Maine Vaccine Board to further this goal.

I practice general pediatrics in Brunswick, starting in 1979. I have borne witness to dramatic improvements in our children's health with new vaccines now available and improved immunization rates. The past three years have been difficult for all of us. Initially, during the COVID pandemic, we were severely limited in our ability to see children for routine checkups and immunizations. We are still working to get caught up on needed medical care for these children. Our immunization rates have significantly slipped, and we have (nationally) seen outbreaks of disease in areas with more unimmunized, susceptible children. Measles is the most contagious of the diseases we routinely immunize against. In a susceptible population, each new case of measles results in 18 additional cases. That means it can spread like wildfire! The epidemiologists calculate that in order to prevent the spread of measles, we need a childhood immunization rate in excess of 95% of children being properly immunized. It has dropped below that level in Maine and other states during the pandemic.

To improve our childhood immunization rates, in 2021 the legislature implemented a change, requiring children attending school to only have exemptions from the mandatory immunizations if there is a documented medical condition making immunizations contraindicated. We have seen substantial improvement in the rates of fully immunized children starting kindergarten with these more stringent requirements. In 2020 there was a referendum to repeal elimination of non-medical exemptions for immunizations. This passed with a more than 70% voter approval!

Please help keep our children and communities healthier by leaving this requirement for adequate immunizations in place. Please do not hesitate to contact me if there is any additional information I can help you with.

SINCERELY,
LAWRENCE J. LOSEY, MD, FAAP
HARPSWELL, ME