

Lauren Knebel  
Cape Elizabeth  
LD 51

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

My name is Lauren Knebel. I am a long-time Maine resident, a homeowner, taxpayer, parent, and teacher. This is my written testimony in SUPPORT of LD 51, LD 869, LD 1098, LD 1148, LD 1209, and LD 1228. I

I have sent two children through Maine's school system and have one student still in the K-12 education. As a parent, I have watched the harms of the educational and school closure policies of the past two+ years. As a teacher, I see the destructive impacts of those same policies on behavior, academic performance, learning, and ability to connect in a healthy manner with classmates and peers. I have seen the rise of mental issues in my own children and my children's friends.

The COVID response in Maine - applicable to all students - is a statewide example of what those students have gone through, who, because of LD798, had to leave not just K-12 publicly-funded school (that would be bad enough), but private schools, and online schools chartered through Maine. K-12 students have had to leave school, including the online program where I taught in 2021-2022 because they didn't have all their vaccines. Adult students had to leave their college programs in Maine to pursue education in other states, where they didn't have to compromise their health, religious, or philosophical beliefs in order to receive the education that their parents or themselves as taxpayers were already paying for. Maine will likely never get those students back. It will also never get back the families who left the state because of the Maine government's legislative and executive branch overreach in selectively applying the concept of "My Body, My Choice," which then progressed into outright one-branch, one-party tyranny during COVID times.

Travel nurses can work in Maine without having received the COVID injections but Maine nurses can't?

Families who can't get the the elusive, unicorn medical exemptions for the school schedule injections, are unable to send their kids to attend the schools that they are still forced to pay for through taxes. Families who choose long-term wellness, knowing that you "can't inject health" have to give up their students' rightful education. As a result, families are still paying for a publicly-funded service, which they are outright denied access to. They can't even pay again (in addition to their taxes) to attend private school without being denied their parental rights on how to keep their children healthy.

The rise in homeschooling in Maine and the decline in school enrollments began with the arbitrary and discriminatory implementation of LD798 in the Fall of 2020. Students who can't attend school in Maine (public, private, parochial, or publicly-chartered online schools) because of their vaccination status can coach the school's teams. Parents can volunteer in schools, which their parents can't attend. Faculty and staff don't have to be vaccinated to attend schools, but students do. Students can't graduate with their classmates and friends from their entire school lives. Immigrant students are being allowed to attend school without all the injections yet an unknown and untold number of Maine students (whose parents are paying for that education) can't attend schools. Why are those immigrant students not kicked out of school because of "health?" Are their rights to education somehow stronger than those of other Maine students?

What does all this say? It says - Your voice doesn't matter, your rights don't matter. Heck, your children's education, mental, and physical health don't matter. We'll still collect your taxes but won't let you use one of the few government-run services that most people expect to access. Maine has abrogated its legal responsibility to provide equal and fair access to education under the state constitution and under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Instead, it has set up a system of marginalization and

discrimination.

I see the mental health challenges in my own kids, in my kids' friends, and with the challenges of getting mental health supports in Maine. Our young people have paid the price long-enough for the short-sighted, irresponsible, inequitable, arbitrary, and harmful legislation that was LD798. It is time to end the charade that any of this was about protecting health.

I urge you to vote YES in support of all of the above bills. Do not allow our students' physical and mental health to be further harmed by keeping them away from the essential academic and social connections to which they have a right. Do NOT try to add the experimental COVID injections to the school schedule, and restore the right for students to attend the schools of their choice by restoring philosophical and religious exemption in K-12 public, private, parochial, and charter schools, as well as Maine's institutions of higher learning.

Sincerely,

Lauren Knebel