



*P.O. Box 315/ 29 Association Drive, Manchester, ME 04351 * Phone: 207-623-1101 *
Fax: 207-623-4228 * www.mainedo.org*

Testimony of the Maine Osteopathic Association
Before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

In Reference to:

**LD 51, An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to
Immunization Requirements**

**LD 1098, An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions Regarding Immunization
Requirements**

**LD 1209, An Act to Reinstate the Religious and Philosophical Vaccine Exemptions for Private Schools and
Public Charter Schools**

Public Hearing: Monday, April 3, 2023 10:00 AM, Cross Building, Room 208

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

My name is Jodie Hermann, DO, FACOI, FACP, MBA. I am board certified in Internal Medicine and Neuromuscular Manual Medicine and I practice internal medicine and Osteopathic Manipulative Medicine at area hospitals, such as Maine Medical Center. I am pleased to provide testimony on behalf of the Maine Osteopathic Association in opposition to LD51, LD 1098 and LD1209, which all propose to reinstate religious and philosophical exemptions removed from Public Law 2019, chapter 154.

The Maine Osteopathic Association (MOA) is a professional organization representing approximately 400 osteopathic physicians as well as more than 700 residents and students. Our mission is to “serve the Osteopathic profession of the State of Maine through a coordinated effort of professional education, advocacy and member services in order to ensure the availability of quality osteopathic health care to the people of this State.”

The MOA is a strong supporter of childhood immunizations and was a proponent of the 2019 law as well as a member of the No on 1 Campaign Coalition opposing the statewide referendum attempting to appeal the law. There are dozens of diseases that can be prevented with routine childhood vaccination, including Measles, Pertussis, Mumps, Hepatitis, Polio, Varicella, etc. The side effects and risks of contracting these diseases range from mild discomfort to such as fever, chills, and vomiting to drastic outcomes like heart failure, paralysis or even death. Most childhood vaccines are 90% to 99% effective in preventing disease.¹ The safety of vaccines is thoroughly studied before they are licensed for public use and there is a strong system in place to monitor the safety of vaccines. As is the case with any medicine, vaccines can cause side effects. However, serious adverse events from vaccines are very rare.²

¹ American Academy of Pediatrics. (2018). <https://www.healthychildren.org/english/safety-prevention/immunizations/pages/vaccine-safety-the-facts.aspx>

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). <https://www.cdc.gov/Features/VaccineSafety/>

Maine's vaccine law has had its fair share of debate. The Legislature passed the law striking religious and philosophical exemptions in 2019, after very careful consideration. Then in 2020, a people's veto attempted to overturn this decision. Maine people voted and a wide majority (more than 72%) chose to protect public health by eliminating non-medical exemptions in our school-ready vaccine laws.

In 2017-2018, Maine had the 7th highest non-medical vaccine exemption rate in the country, a rate which continued to increase to a peak of over 5.0% in the 2019-2020 school year³. Researchers have repeatedly shown that when it's easier for parents to avoid vaccines, vaccine exemptions rise. When exemption rates climb, herd immunity is weakened and the risk of outbreak rises. In many areas of the state, Maine's community immunity was well below safe thresholds and disease outbreaks were a distinct threat.

Since the passage of Public Law 154, Maine's rates for school-ready vaccinations have greatly improved. [Maine CDC's latest School Immunization Assessment Report \(2021-2022\)](#)⁴ reported that more than 95 percent of kindergarteners were vaccinated for diseases such as whooping cough, polio and measles during the 2021-2022 school year, an improvement of two percentage points compared to the year before. Total exemptions also fell to 1.8 percent, which is half the rate from the previous year.

These results are very encouraging. Because of Public Law 154 Maine's children are better protected from preventable diseases. And parents, along with their children's healthcare professionals, are still able to opt out of vaccinations when and if medically appropriate.

It is for these reasons the MOA urges the committee to vote ought not to pass on LD 51, LD 1098 and LD 1209.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at info@mainedo.org if you have any questions. Thank you.

³ Mellerson JL, Maxwell CB, Knighton CL, Kriss JL, Seither R, Black CL. Vaccination Coverage for Selected Vaccines and Exemption Rates Among Children in Kindergarten — United States, 2017–18 School Year. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2018;67:1115–1122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6740a3>

⁴ Maine CDC. 2021-2022 Maine School Immunization Assessment Report. <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/immunization/publications/2021/2021-2022%20Maine%20School%20Immunization%20Assessment%20Report.pdf>