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April 3, 2023

Testimony of the Maine Association of School Nurses in Opposition of LD 51, "An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements".

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Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee: My name is Angie Buker and I am president of the Maine Association of School Nurses (MASN) and a member of the National Association of School Nurses (NASN). MASN represents more than half of Maine's Pre K-12 school nurses. Our mission is to optimize student health and learning by advancing the practice of school nursing.

MASN has reviewed the above proposed legislation and has concluded that we cannot support LD 51 "An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements".

It is the position of NASN that immunizations are essential to primary prevention of disease from infancy through adulthood. Promotion of immunizations by the registered professional school nurse is central to the public health focus of school nursing practice. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2011), the impact of vaccines in reducing and eliminating vaccine-preventable diseases has been one of the 10 great public health achievements in the United States.

This law has already been debated and decided in 2019 with more than 72% of the voters choosing to protect public health by eliminating loopholes in Maine school vaccine laws. Since this decision was made vaccine exemptions have decreased from 6.2% to 1.8% in 2021 according to the annual Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count survey. This means that more children are protected against preventable diseases. That leaves a small portion of children that have medical conditions prohibiting specific immunizations. When granted appropriately, medical exemptions do not compromise community immunity. It is this specific group of children that depend on community immunity for protection in order to safely attend school.

We ask you to please consider these reasons, maintain Maine's strong vaccination law and not move the problem to different sectors. MASN urges the committee to vote **Ought Not to Pass on LD 51**. Thank you for listening to the concerns of MASN as we strive to keep our students healthy and in the classroom as well as support parents making the best healthcare decisions for their children.