



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Opposition 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 Virtual Public Charter Schools**

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Room 208, Cross State Office Building  
Monday, April 3, 2023

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brenner, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association.

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 700 individual members and 60 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine's communities, and we take that responsibility seriously.

These bills would restore religious and philosophical exemptions to immunizations required for elementary, secondary and postsecondary schools and employees of nursery schools and certain health care facilities.

We are only as healthy as the world around us, which is why strong immunization laws are one of the most effective ways to improve the health of our communities. Data from immunization surveys indicate that states with stronger immunization laws have higher immunization rates and sufficient herd immunity to prevent outbreaks. The safety, efficacy, and cost-effectiveness of routine childhood vaccines has been well-established and is supported by sound, scientific studies. The legality and constitutionality of school and daycare immunization requirements held in all 50 states has been vigorously upheld in courts, and these laws have led to increased immunization rates and a reduction in U.S. morbidity and mortality associated with infectious diseases. When voters were asked if they wanted to repeal the provisions outlined in [LD 798/PL 154](#), 73% of voters said no – in other words, a resounding majority of Maine voters support requiring vaccinations for schoolchildren and professionals in health care settings.

There are many different policy options for improving immunization rates, such as improving access to vaccines, implementing immunization registries, requiring provider and parent education, improving reporting requirements, and increasing funding for vaccine research and development. Maine has expanded vaccine access for all Maine children by eliminating financial barriers, and our healthcare providers follow

recommendations to engage families in conversations about the benefits of vaccines. Furthermore, if a patient has a valid medical exemption for a required vaccine, health care providers issue such an exemption.

Other states that have eliminated philosophical exemptions, only to see their religious exemptions increase, and states that have mandated parent-provider education did not see a significant reduction in opt-out rates. These approaches simply aren't enough to protect our communities. In fact, vaccine hesitancy due to false information and myths has grown so large, that the World Health Organization listed vaccine hesitancy as one of the top ten threats to global health in 2019.

All major medical and public health organizations have issued policy statements in support of eliminating non-medical exemptions,<sup>1</sup> and other states and Congress are discussing ways to strengthen immunization laws to protect and uphold the rights of all – to keep everyone safe, including those who cannot protect themselves. Maintaining our strong, existing immunization laws is the fastest, most cost-effective way to increase and maintain high immunization rates in schools now and for generations to come. Maine cannot afford to go back in time and allow non-medical exemptions.

We respectfully request you to vote LD 51, LD 1098, and LD 1209 “Ought Not to Pass.” Thank you for considering our testimony.

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<sup>1</sup> Immunize.org. [State Laws and Mandates by Vaccine](#).