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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Written Testimony of Rep. Marc Malon Opposing:

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”

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Marc Malon, and I proudly represent House District 133, which is part of the great city of Biddeford. Today I am providing you with written testimony **opposing LDs 51, 1098, and 1209**, which would weaken important provisions of public health for Maine children and families.

The past several years have clearly demonstrated the importance of vaccines in preventing and reducing the spread of communicable diseases. The distribution of vaccines and boosters against COVID-19 has reduced its spread and significantly reduced hospitalizations and deaths. So too, have vaccines that provide protection against other diseases, such as measles, mumps, rubella, polio, chicken pox, tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (whooping cough). Being up to date on one’s vaccines against these diseases helps prevent co-occurring illnesses, which could exacerbate the health impact of COVID if one was infected.

Public Law 154, passed by a bipartisan vote of the Legislature, signed into law by Governor Mills and overwhelmingly upheld by Maine voters, was one of the most important public health measures passed in recent Maine history. At the time of passage, Maine had the fourth highest rate of non-medical opt-outs for required vaccines in schools, which put our community immunity below safe thresholds for disease outbreaks. Indeed, at the time, it was common to hear of schools and daycares being closed to outbreaks of diseases like pertussis. Removing non-

medical exemptions for vaccine requirements resulted in a significant drop in opt-outs, making our schools safer and healthier.

Strong vaccine laws are not new and have resulted in the virtual eradication of diseases like smallpox and polio. Unfortunately, misinformation has resulted in too many people not receiving the protection they need against other preventable illnesses. Weakening Maine's strong vaccine laws at a time when protecting people's health should be paramount is something we simply cannot allow ourselves to do.

I urge the committee to vote on all three of these bills **ought not to pass**.