

Administrative Services Center

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April 3, 2023

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

Penobscot Community Health Care (PCHC), Maine's largest Federally Qualified Health Center, which provides care to more than 57,000 patients, including more than 15,000 children, and which has consistently endeavored to maintain high rates of vaccination for our patients of all ages and for the greater community in the interests of disease prevention and protection of the most vulnerable among us, opposes any efforts to reverse the important gains made when 72% of Mainers voted in 2020 to eliminate loopholes in our school-ready vaccine laws. LD 798/PL 154 has already had an important impact, with exemptions decreasing from 6.2% in 2018 (a level that increased the risk of outbreaks of highly contagious diseases, like measles and whooping cough) to 1.8% in 2021. All major religious groups agree that vaccines align with the moral and ethical principles of their theologies. Vaccines are kosher, halal and approved by the Vatican.

Therefore, PCHC strongly opposes LD 81, LD 1098 and LD 1209. These bills would undermine the important individual and public health gains made under our current law and would put vulnerable children and adults at risk for life-threatening disease, as well as risk harmful outbreaks in our Maine communities.

We at PCHC also oppose LD 1228, LD 1148, and LD 869, which would restrict requirements for Covid vaccine. Students of all ages should be able to learn in an environment that they know is safe and will not unnecessarily put them at risk for serious or even life-threatening illness. More than ¾ of all Mainers have been safely vaccinated against Covid, which has resulted in Maine having one of the lowest death rates from Covid in the US, despite having one of the oldest populations. Covid vaccines are safe and highly effective at preventing hospitalization and death from Covid. Unvaccinated Mainers are 8 times more likely to be hospitalized than those who are vaccinated. Emergency Use Authorizations are implemented after very careful evaluation of the available science and are a vital tool in responding in a timely manner to a virus that is undergoing constant change. Undermining the state's or our schools' ability to protect students, faculty and staff will cause unnecessary harm.

We urge you to reject all of these bills. Each of them would undermine individual and public health, increase suffering and add cost to our Maine communities. Please uphold Maine's great tradition of leading in this realm of public health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lori Dwyer".

Lori Dwyer, President and CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Cheff".

Susan Cheff, MD, FAAFP
Executive Clinical Director for Primary Care

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Noah Nesin, MD".

Noah Nesin, MD, FAAFP
Innovation Advisor for Primary Care