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Testimony of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In Opposition to LD 601, *An Act to Reduce the Shortage of Municipal Emergency Medical Services Personnel by Removing Certain Vaccination Requirements*

Hearing Date: April 24, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Ann Farmer and I am the Associate Director of the Division of Disease Surveillance at the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention at the Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to provide testimony on behalf of the Maine CDC and will be speaking against LD 601, *An Act to Reduce the Shortage of Municipal Emergency Medical Services Personnel by Removing Certain Vaccination Requirements*.

This bill would effectively over-rule the Maine EMS Board's adopted rule and allow emergency medical services persons to provide treatment within the scope of their licenses without having been vaccinated against the COVID-19 virus or the influenza virus.

From a public health perspective, unvaccinated EMS personnel are at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 or influenza and potentially transmitting these viruses to co-workers and the vulnerable patients that they are responsible for protecting. Generally, when someone is providing an emergency response they are providing care to individuals whose health is vulnerable. It is the moral and legal responsibility of providers to ensure they are minimizing risk to their patients. And, patients should be able to expect this protection from their providers. To deny the reinforcement of vaccine adherence amongst EMS personnel will result in harmful outcomes to both the EMS community and their patients.

The most frequently cited reasons for choosing not to be immunized include concerns about safety and effectiveness, as well as concerns about vaccine side effects. Misinformation about vaccination has fueled these concerns, and the Maine CDC encourages anyone with such concerns to consider information from trusted sources and review their concerns with medical professionals as they consider what is best for them.

Additionally, state agencies must have access to the full range of tools to protect the public health. Rules related to immunization requirements have been duly adopted following public processes. In the event of public health emergencies, the State should not be hamstrung by statute that limits their ability to be responsive.

To summarize, the Maine CDC opposes LD 601. Good public health policy is data-driven and evidence-based. Maine's immunization requirements are in place to ensure full protection of all Mainers from vaccine-preventable disease. The evidence is overwhelming, sound, and supported by the professional medical community. Vaccinations are proven to be safe and effective for limiting the spread of COVID-19 disease and reducing the severity of its impact on individuals and the State's healthcare system as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter and for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I can address questions from the Committee and I will be available to participate in the work session.