



Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Opposition to:

LD 59: An Act to Prohibit Inclusion of the COVID-19 Vaccine in the Universal Childhood Immunization Program

LD 172: An Act to Allow Health Care Workers to Return to Work by Reinstating Exemptions from Immunization Requirements

LD 601: An Act to Reduce the Shortage of Municipal Emergency Medical Services Personnel by Removing Certain Vaccination Requirements

LD 1382: An Act to Establish the Guiding Public Health Principles of Focused Protection for Pandemics of a Highly Infectious Respiratory Disease

LD 1547: An Act to Temporarily Prohibit the State from Mandating COVID-19 Vaccinations

LD 1598: An Act to Allow an Exception to Immunization Requirements for Health Care Workers for Vaccines Approved Under Emergency Use Authorization

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Room 209, Cross State Office Building
Monday, April 24, 2023

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. 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.

We believe these bills would roll-back and undermine Maine's strong vaccine laws, lower vaccine confidence, and threaten public health, and write today in opposition to LD 59, LD 172, LD 601, LD 1382, LD 1547, and LD 1598.

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. 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. Public health requirements for healthcare and emergency service workers, including immunizations, are also

essential to protecting the medically vulnerable patients they care for, as well as their colleagues and community.

Data consistently show that vaccines are safe, effective, and necessary for good public health. Maine has safely administered more than 3,266,862 COVID-19 vaccines to more than 76% of the state's population. COVID-19 is a serious disease. Contracting COVID-19 can cause pneumonia, chronic fatigue, injury to organs, including the heart, liver, and kidneys, Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome, septic shock, blood clots, and death. Unvaccinated patients who contract COVID-19 are more likely to have more serious disease, and to be more expensive to provide care to than vaccinated patients: An unvaccinated Mainer is 8 times more likely to be hospitalized than someone who is vaccinated, at an average cost of \$71,036 for noncomplex cases and \$302,704 for complex cases.

The COVID-19 vaccine is not a required vaccine for school-entry. Prohibiting it from being included would reduce vaccine access and increase financial burden for Maine families who choose to immunize their children against this deadly disease. Furthermore, in Maine, if a patient has a valid medical exemption for a required vaccine, health care providers issue such an exemption.

All major medical and public health organizations have issued policy statements in support of eliminating non-medical exemptions,¹ 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 Maine communities now and for generations to come.

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. We are concerned about the threats to public health posed by these bills, and respectfully request you to please vote LD 59, LD 172, LD 601, LD 1382, LD 1547, and LD 1598 “Ought Not to Pass.” Thank you for considering our testimony.

¹ Immunize.org. [State Laws and Mandates by Vaccine](#).