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Testimony in opposition to LD 113 by Sydney R. Sewall, MD MPH (Hallowell)

Sen. Talbot-Ross, Rep. Pluecker -- and members of the Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry committee --

I am representing the views of the hundreds of Pediatricians distributed throughout our state -- all of whom have daily encounters with parents who choose not to vaccinate their children based on falsehoods generated by widespread vaccine disinformation. We fear that food labeling as proposed by this bill is not only unnecessary but would also contribute to vaccine hesitancy. The presence of the label would strongly suggest that an animal's exposure to a specific vaccine can make the FOOD less safe.

The testimony provided by veterinary experts at the February hearing pointed out the fact that there are no mRNA vaccines currently approved for use in animals. I believe, however, that intensive research is ongoing directed at developing mRNA products to protect animals (and humans) from the avian flu virus. The elimination of the need for millions of eggs for flu vaccine production is an obvious logistical benefit of this technology.

The fear of mRNA in this context stems from the false assumption that the vaccine may somehow alter the genetics of the animal by altering the DNA of its cells -- that the food becomes a type of GMO. The biology of intracellular compartments makes this impossible.

Scientists considered the possibility of mRNA vaccines for decades before COVID but were limited by their inability to get it into cells. The breakthrough that led to mRNA vaccines was the discovery that you could overcome this barrier by encasing mRNA in a lipid nanoparticle, which gets it past the outer cell membrane into the cytoplasm. There the cell's own preexisting protein manufacturing machinery goes to work synthesizing the structure coded by the mRNA. This protein antigen exists and triggers an immune reaction to fight infection. This all takes place OUTSIDE the nucleus, which is in its own compartment. Cellular DNA is not affected.

Thus, the notion that hamburger meat or chicken nuggets from a vaccinated animal is "different" has no scientific basis. Nonetheless, we can expect rigorous premarketing evaluation of any future veterinary mRNA vaccine regarding both its efficacy and safety for the animal, and the purity of the resulting food product.

The Maine AAP urges you to oppose this bill. We believe it would be detrimental to our efforts to provide scientifically based preventive care to our patients.

Sincerely,

Sydney R. Sewall, MD MPH

Hallowell