

Nell Bridger  
Portland  
LD 174

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I am writing in strong opposition to both LD 174 LD (An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements) and LD 727 (An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools).

As a school nurse, I monitor students' vaccination status closely. Prior to our current immunization law, more than 10% of students were not fully vaccinated - below the level to provide herd immunity against many diseases. Before working in a school, I worked in a hospital pediatric unit. I saw children die from vaccine-preventable illnesses, a tragic event one must only witness once to become a staunch vaccine advocate. I also cared for many immunocompromised children who were unable to be fully immunized due to their health status. Herd immunity is the only way to protect these vulnerable members of our communities.

I fully supported the bill that eliminated religious and personal exemptions. A public referendum was overwhelmingly defeated by 72% of voters to uphold the law. In 2021, the law was finally implemented and vaccination rates improved. In 2024, the vaccination rate of Maine school children was 95% - one of the highest in the country.

Currently we have a measles outbreak in 20 states in our country. Every day at my job I feel thankful for Maine's vaccine law ensuring we have at least 95% measles vaccination rate, which should be sufficient to provide protection if, I shudder to think, measles finds its way to Maine. Going backward on school vaccination requirements is not in the best interest of the health of our students and communities.

Thank you for your consideration.

Nell Bridger, RN, BSN, NCSN