

4/2/2025

Subject: Opposition to LD 174 – An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements

Chairman Rafferty, Senator Pierce, Senator Libby, and Education and Cultural Affairs Committee Members,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the potential for exemptions to vaccination requirements as outlined LD 174 – An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements. While I understand that personal beliefs and individual rights are important, I firmly believe that granting exemptions for vaccinations undermines public health efforts and puts vulnerable populations at greater risk.

Vaccines are one of the most effective and proven ways to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. By allowing exemptions—whether for religious or personal reasons—we risk compromising the herd immunity that protects those who are most vulnerable, including infants, the elderly, and individuals with compromised immune systems who may not be able to receive vaccinations themselves. These exemptions not only endanger those individuals but also contribute to the resurgence of diseases that were once under control. We are seeing in other states how previously eradicated diseases are making resurgences due to a lack of vaccination. These lives are being lost due to a lack of information and widespread misinformation. These lives are being lost due and families are being burdened with unnecessary medical bills, funeral costs, grief, and interpersonal difficulties.

It is essential that we prioritize the collective health and safety of our community. When individuals choose not to vaccinate, they are not only putting themselves at risk but also endangering others who rely on the immunity of the community to stay protected. Vaccination is a shared responsibility, and exemptions based on non-scientific reasons weaken the effectiveness of vaccination programs and hinder efforts to eliminate preventable diseases.

I urge you to consider the broader implications of allowing exemptions and to prioritize the health of the community over personal beliefs when individuals are in public spaces. This is beyond allowing people to make choices with their bodies when they are also choosing to socialize or be in public spaces while infected. Our public health policies must reflect the importance of science and collective well-being. Allowing exceptions for vaccinations could have far-reaching consequences, particularly in the context of recent outbreaks of preventable diseases. Up to 40% of Maine's population is considered vulnerable when looking at health conditions, age, and access to healthcare services. Our state would greatly struggle if our already overburdened healthcare system became burdened with preventable diseases.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue. I hope you will take a strong stance in support of vaccination requirements for the benefit of public health.

Sincerely,

Reverend Brooklin Jones-Banahan, LCSW