

Stephanie Choate
Albion
LD 174

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

As a lifelong Mainer, mom and nurse, I am 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). For the last 7 years I have worked full-time as an elementary school nurse and continue to work per diem on Maternity & Pediatrics. In the hospital setting I administer pediatric immunizations and in the school setting I monitor the vaccination status of students. Childhood immunizations are crucial for preventing serious diseases that can cause illness, disability, and even death, while also protecting vulnerable populations by building community immunity.

Prior to our current immunization law, more than 10% of students were not fully vaccinated - below the level to provide community immunity against many diseases. 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. This has a positive impact both locally and globally. Currently we have a measles outbreak in 20 states in our country. During a time in our state when we have hospitals closing, in-patient units full and emergency departments overflowing with waiting patients going backward on school vaccination requirements is not in the best interest of the health of our students and communities. For these reasons, I oppose LD 174 and LD 727.

Thank you for your hard work and commitment to the health and safety of our students.