



April 3, 2025

Testimony in OPPOSITION to LD 174 and LD 727

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
For April 7, 2025

To: Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the  
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Adeline Winkes. I am a pediatrician, honored to live and serve in rural Maine for the last nine years. I would like to express my strong opposition to LD 174 and LD 727.

I have served as a pediatrician for more than twenty years. Before I moved to Maine, I was fortunate enough to live&practice in several areas of the US, including Rhode Island, Illinois, Hawaii and Virginia. I have seen wide variation in immunization rates and practices, across the US, and have unfortunately had firsthand experience with the devastation that vaccine-preventable diseases can cause, to individuals, to families and to communities. In Hawaii, in particular, I was caring for children who came to Honolulu (seeking medical care) from around the Pacific Basin. Some of these children were unfortunately very ill - and some died - of diseases that we no longer commonly see in the mainland US, due to higher vaccination levels here. These diseases, in an era of global air travel, are unfortunately just a plane ride away from our more sheltered communities here.

I would like to specifically note the following:

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1. Maine's vaccine law is working.

- In 2019, Maine passed one of the strongest vaccine laws in the country with overwhelming bipartisan support.
- Since then, our rates of nonmedical exemptions have dropped dramatically, from 6.2% in 2019 to 0.9% today. This means that more children are protected, and more schools are safer from outbreaks.
- This law was passed because Mainers recognized that science, not misinformation, should guide public health policy.

2. LD 174 and LD 727 would turn back the clock.

- LD 174 would reinstate nonmedical (religious) exemptions—just as we've finally made progress in closing loopholes that allowed preventable disease to spread. LD 727 goes even further, seeking to remove all vaccine requirements. This would endanger children, educators, healthcare workers, and immunocompromised individuals across the state.

3. We are already seeing the consequences of rolling back public health protections.

- Across the country, vaccine-preventable diseases like measles are surging again—including outbreaks in states where exemption rates are high and vaccination laws are weak.
- At the same time, public health infrastructure is underfunded and stretched thin. Now is not the time to create more risk.

4. Vaccines are a shared responsibility—and they protect everyone.

- Schools, daycares, and healthcare facilities rely on high vaccination rates to keep vulnerable people safe—like newborns, elderly people, and those who can't be vaccinated for medical reasons.

Repealing vaccine requirements would shift the burden onto these vulnerable groups and the people who care for them.

5. Maine voters already spoke.

- In 2020, 73% of Maine voters overwhelmingly upheld our vaccine law at the ballot box after it was challenged by referendum. That vote showed broad, bipartisan support for strong immunization policies.
- These bills would undo the will of the people and put our kids' health back up for debate.

I care for children in midcoast Maine regardless of their vaccination status. I am honestly relieved when the children I care for are fully vaccinated. I know they are much safer than their counterparts, many of whom I worry about having inadvertent exposures to diseases that are truly dangerous. I also care for children who have medical conditions which preclude them being vaccinated, but who attend schools and daycares, or are otherwise out in public. In order for those medically fragile children to be protected from exposure to devastating diseases, their playmates and classmates need to have a high vaccination rate.

It has been heart-warming to witness the willingness of many families in the last few years, who were initially hesitant to have their children receive certain vaccines, but more recently have agreed to do so, after the protective nature of these vaccines (for the larger community as well as their own child) was pointed out to them. This message is reinforced by the laws around mandatory vaccines for school attendance.

6. The questions for lawmakers are simple:

- Why would we walk back something that is working?
- Why take unnecessary risks with our children's health, our schools, and our communities—especially now?

I respectfully urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on these bills.

Thank you for your time - and thoughtful consideration in these matters.

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