

**Testimony In Opposition to LD 174 An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements and LD 727 An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools Before the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee, April 7, 2025**

**Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and Esteemed Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee.**

**My name is Mary Emily Bussey, a resident of Brunswick, Maine. I am a retired pediatrician and neonatologist. I am strongly opposed to these two acts, which would endanger the lives and health of all Maine citizens, in particular the children in school, adults with conditions making them susceptible to the ravages of these communicable diseases, and pregnant women and their fetuses.**

There are many pragmatic reasons why these bills are detrimental to the State of Maine. The resurgence of these infectious diseases will place significant burdens on the health care system in Maine due to the need for care for the individuals who become ill. The cost of this burden will of course be passed on to the taxpayer. Those individuals who survive with significant disabilities will also place a significant financial burden on the State. I know that the other representatives of the AAP will discuss these issues. I am going to share my experiences with these diseases because I am old enough to have cared for victims of these conditions.

The diseases for which the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends immunization are not minor illnesses that constitute rites of passage for childhood. I graduated from medical school in 1977, so I have had personal experience caring for children suffering and dying from complications of these "common childhood ailments." I have cared for children suffering from the complications of measles: pneumonia, encephalitis, and most devastating subacute sclerosing panencephalitis, a uniformly fatal neurological disease that can occur 7-11 years after the episode of measles. I have seen numerous children dying or suffering severe neurological sequelae from Hemophilus influenzae infections, which are now completely preventable. Likewise serious infections from Pneumococcus and Meningococcus. There are now vaccines which prevent these diseases. I have seen infants born with deformities after the

mother contacted chicken pox during her pregnancy. I have cared for many children suffering congenital rubella syndrome, which may include hearing loss, congenital heart disease, micro-ophthalmia (small eyes), microcephaly (abnormally small brain), cataracts, glaucoma, significant cognition and motor defects.

My most personal experience with preventable disease was during my childhood. I grew up on the Georgia Warm Springs Foundation, established by President Roosevelt for the care of individuals with polio. Many of my friends and their parents were afflicted with this devastating disease and lived their entire lives in wheelchairs, requiring significant assistance for daily activities. I have seen children unable to breathe on their own, sequestered in iron lungs. Before the Salk vaccine was available, parents were terrified of the possibility of this disease, spread by contact with stool or respiratory secretions, especially during the summer months. Children were secluded, or in the case of parents who could afford it, rushed out of urban areas during the summer months to rural locations.

Those of you who are proposing this bill are too young to have experienced the devastation of these totally preventable conditions. Due to the development of safe and effective vaccines, these diseases have almost completely disappeared in the United States until recently. Many young pediatricians have never seen a case of *Haemophilus influenzae* meningitis or pneumococcal pneumonia or diphtheria. Congenital rubella has become extremely rare because of screening of pregnant women and immunization. You may believe that these are minor illnesses, which pose no risk to your children. Yes, most children survive measles, chicken pox, mumps (although older males may develop sterility). But are you willing to play roulette with your child's life? And are you willing to accept the guilt if your child's measles infects a pregnant mother or teacher, and she miscarries? Are you willing to face the fact that your child's infectivity may severely harm a child, teacher, or mother undergoing chemotherapy for some form of cancer or suffering from an immune deficiency?

We need to develop a sense of community that has concerns for and cares for the vulnerable individuals in our midst. Refusing to vaccinate your child is rarely a religious decision as conventional religions do not prohibit vaccination, but

rather a personal choice. We need to look around us and understand how our decisions can affect the lives of others.

Thank you for your attention.