

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

My name is Marco Cornelio and I am a family physician in Biddeford as well as a parent of 3 school aged children under 10 years old. I am the President of the Maine Academy of Family Physicians and am speaking today on behalf of the Maine Academy of Family Physicians to express our strong opposition to LD 174 and LD 727.

In 2019, Maine passed a law to make our schools safer by eliminating non-medical exemptions for childhood vaccines required to attend school. Both LD 174 and LD 727 seek to undermine the valuable work done at that time. LD 174 would bring back religious exemptions and LD 727 would remove vaccine requirements altogether - outcomes that would harm Maine children.

As a family physician who care for adults and children, maintaining the current vaccine laws in place is so important to keep all Mainers healthy. Vaccines are the most effective tools we have to prevent diseases and have been for generations. They are extensively tested, approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and are known to be safe. Complications from the diseases they prevent far outweigh the slim number of complications from the vaccines themselves. While we acknowledge all vaccines and medications have side effects, the benefits of vaccination heavily outweigh their risks. Many diseases such as measles, polio, whooping cough and meningitis caused serious illness and death before the introduction of these vaccines.

I have seen the current vaccine requirements help motivate parents to bring their children in for their check-up and vaccine appointments so they can still attend school. Because of these laws, about 97% of Maine kids are vaccinated with the required vaccines for school while the national average is only 93%¹. Maine is a national leader in vaccination and public health and we should keep it that way.

As a parent with school aged kids knowing their classmates are immunized from disease gives me comfort and knows my own kids are less likely to become sick. This is ever more present now with the measles outbreak that started in Texas and has spread to nearby states. According to the CDC, over 400 people have been diagnosed with measles thus far and 1 child has died from the outbreak in Texas². For comparison, there were 285 people diagnosed with measles in the entire United States in all of 2024³. This concerning pattern serves as a warning that childhood illnesses that were once considered eradicated, can and do return causing much harm, illness and death. This occurs in communities where vaccine rates fall, rendering unvaccinated children susceptible to these serious illnesses.

I can't overstate how important strong vaccine laws are to keep our children healthy from preventable diseases. Even today, we can look to other areas of our country to see what happens when vaccine laws are weakened. I respectfully urge you to vote "ought not to pass" on LD 174 and LD 727.

Marco Cornelio MD, FAAFP

President of Maine Academy of Family Physicians

1. Coverage with Selected Vaccines and Exemption Rates Among Children in Kindergarten — United States, 2023–24 School Year. *Weekly* / October 17, 2024 / 73(41);925–932. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7341a3.htm>
2. Measles Outbreak – April 1, 2025. www.dshs.texas.gov/news-alerts/measles-outbreak-2025
3. Measles Cases and Outbreaks. March 28, 2025. www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html