

**Testimony in Opposition to LD 727, An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools and LD 174, An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements**

Senator Rafferty, Rep. Murphy, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Maura Pillsbury. I am a resident of Freeport and a former member of a vaccine hesitant private school community. For several years, my children's private school failed to report its vaccination rates to the state. Upon my inquiries, they told me the opt out rate was 15%. The following year to my astonishment, Maine CDC published in a report that 40% of my child's kindergarten class was not vaccinated.

I felt betrayed by a community I had trusted to protect my family, including my baby, who was too young to be vaccinated. I knew we also had parents and students who had compromised immune systems or were undergoing cancer treatment. Simply put, our school community failed to protect its most vulnerable members, exposing them to unnecessary risk. We didn't know when we selected this school that we were entering a vaccine-hesitant community.

Thanks to PL 154 passed during the 129<sup>th</sup> legislature, we have successfully increased school vaccination rates in Maine, meaning decreased risk that disease will spread in our schools and communities. Vaccine hesitant private school communities create pockets of high vaccine opt-outs that have the ability to affect dozens of other communities because students may reside across many other towns. There were cases of chicken pox in both the private school and the daycare my children attended. Students lose a minimum of three weeks of instructional time when an outbreak of disease such as chicken pox or whooping cough occurs. That's almost 10% of the school year.

We all deserve safe schools and communities, free from the threat of disease. Please do not roll back vaccine requirements that have been so successful in increasing vaccination rates. This would endanger my immune-compromised friends and family, who deserve to attend school and go out in public without worrying about contracting the measles or any other vaccine-preventable disease.

Please oppose LD 727 and LD 174. These bills would undo the huge step forward we took with our vaccine law, which was overwhelmingly upheld by Maine voters at the polls. Please protect Maine's children and communities. Thank you for your time.