



Testimony before the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

LD 174 An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements

LD 727 An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools

April 7, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rev. Jane Field. I am the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches, a coalition of seven mainline Protestant denominations who have more than 400 local congregations in Maine with over 50,000 parishioners in their care.

The Council **opposes** both bills before you this morning.

None of our denominations opposes vaccines. (In fact, **NONE of the world's major religions opposes vaccines**—not Buddhism, Mormonism, Judaism, Islam, not even Jehovah's Witnesses or Christian Science).

All of the denominations of our Council support protecting children and adults from diseases that can spread throughout a community and have the potential to cause extreme illness or even death. So, **major religions actually encourage vaccination; some even call it a "moral obligation."**

Thus, the claim that someone's religion prohibits them from vaccinating their children is questionable at best, deceptive at worst.

In fact, one study showed that **many parents who use the religious exemption to evade vaccination laws in other states admit openly to lying about their religion just to get an exemption** (Hastings Law School). And in 2015, after Vermont eliminated a "philosophical" exemption but kept a religious exemption, the **percentage of parents using the religious exemption jumped from .9 percent to 3.7 percent** in one school year—a 300% increase in believers is a miraculous conversion rate for even the most successful evangelist!

Even if there were a religion that prohibited vaccination, we would argue that the need to protect public health would outweigh religious freedom in this case. While the Council is a firm proponent of an individual's right to practice their religion, **we do not believe the exercise of religious freedom should be allowed to pose a risk to public health. The right to practice religion freely does not include the liberty to expose the community to communicable disease, sickness or death.** (A view shared by conservative Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia.)

We are concerned that **the health of our state's children, at-risk adults, and indeed all Mainers would be severely jeopardized if the Legislature reverses its decision to eliminate the religious exemption, and it would most certainly be jeopardized if vaccination requirements were repealed altogether, as LD 727 proposes.**

Therefore, we urge you to **vote OUGHT NOT TO PASS on LD 174 and 727.**

Jane Field
Maine Council of Churches
LD 174

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