

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO

L.D. 174—AN ACT TO RESTORE RELIGIOUS EXEMPTIONS TO IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS

AND

L.D. 727—AN ACT TO REPEAL CERTAIN IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS FOR SCHOOLS

April 7, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Steven Bailey, the executive director of the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in opposition to L.D. 174 and L.D. 727.

Both of these bills propose to relax Maine's school vaccination laws, and we believe they would result in confusion for families and worsen public health for Maine children.

Only four years ago, Maine school districts implemented a state law ending religious and philosophical vaccine exemptions. Administrators, teachers, and school nurses worked closely with families to educate them and help them comply with the new state regulations. This was not an easy process and required months of communication and collaboration to ensure that every family understood these changes. Changing state law once again could create more uncertainty and concern among our parents and community members.

We know that mandatory vaccinations are a difficult and delicate issue. Even among our membership, some administrators and school board members are opposed to these state mandates due to strongly-held feelings and beliefs within their communities.

At the same time, we believe that our first priority as educators is to keep our children safe – all of our children – and we believe that the exemptions being considered today prevent us from fulfilling that obligation.

Vaccines protect our students from some of the worst diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, polio, and varicella. The administration of vaccines to every student ensures they are protected and will not spread these diseases to other students or staff – particularly those who are immunocompromised.

At the same time, we know that these requirements have led some families to withdraw their children from school. We, of course, want all of our children in school, every day. But we also want them to be safe, which is why we feel it is important to maintain our current laws, as is. We also believe that by limiting outbreaks of disease, we can keep more children healthy and inside their classrooms, where we know they learn best.

We believe it makes sense to maintain our laws so that we can continue to protect our children. We ask that you reject L.D. 174 and L.D. 727.