

Testimony in of Dr. Meredith Jackson in OPPOSITION to

- **LD 174, An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements**
- **LD 727, An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools**

Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

April 7, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Honorable Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Dr. Meredith Jackson, and I'm a pediatric hospitalist in Portland and, a member of the Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, a resident of Scarborough, and a mom of two young kids. I am writing in very strong opposition to LD 174 and LD 727, which seek to erode Maine's current vaccine requirements that protect our students and communities from many serious vaccine-preventable illnesses.

LD 174 and LD 727 pose a serious threat to public health, particularly for children. Vaccination requirements are designed to protect communities—especially vulnerable populations such as infants, immunocompromised individuals, and those who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons—by maintaining herd immunity against preventable diseases like measles, whooping cough, and polio. Restoring religious exemptions and repealing immunization requirements would weaken Maine's immunization rates, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks that put the health of all children, vaccinated or not, at greater risk. The 2019 repeal of nonmedical exemptions was a critical step in ensuring high immunization coverage and preventing the resurgence of deadly diseases. Reversing this policy would undermine those public health gains, endangering the safety of schools, childcare centers, and communities at large.

I have personally had to take care of infants with whooping cough, struggling to breathe for weeks at a time in the hospital and no effective treatments available to make the symptoms go away any faster. As a society, we are incredibly lucky to have forgotten the devastation that these vaccine preventable diseases cause. We are in a dangerous time when medical disinformation is becoming mainstream, and these bills would only serve to strengthen that rhetoric. A second child has just been confirmed to have died from measles in the outbreak in west Texas – and in Maine, we have only *just* reached herd immunity for the first time, largely due to the prior vaccine bill that these both seek to undermine.

It is terrifying to imagine the devastating consequences that would come from these bills if passed. Unfortunately, we are likely to see the consequences play out in other states that do not take infectious disease prevention as seriously as Maine does.

As a pediatric hospitalist, the impact of a potential outbreak on our hospital system is a tremendous concern. According to a February 2025 study, average hospital capacity in the US

has reached 75%, approaching the 85% threshold that is considered to signify a shortage. In Maine, our hospital capacity is slightly below the national average –meaning that an outbreak of measles or another serious illness could be disastrous for our hospital systems.

I urge the committee to vote “Ought NOT to Pass” on both LD 174 and LD 727, and help ensure that we do not have to live through the tragedies of the past in the present. Thank you.

Meredith Jackson, MD
Scarborough, Maine