

Testimony Opposing LD 174 and LD 727

Religious and Philosophical Exemptions for Vaccination in School-Age Children

Submitted to the Maine Legislature

On Behalf of the Maine Association of School Nurses (MASN)

Date: April 7, 2025

Honorable Members of the Maine Legislature,

My name is Alana Trottier and I am the President of the Maine Association of School Nurses (MASN). Our association represents the dedicated school nurses who serve the health and well-being of children across the state of Maine. We are writing to express our strong opposition to the allowance of religious and philosophical exemptions for the mandatory vaccination of school-age children.

As frontline healthcare professionals in our schools, we witness firsthand the critical role that vaccination plays in safeguarding the health of individual students and the entire school community. We are deeply concerned about the potential consequences of allowing non-medical exemptions, which undermine the effectiveness of herd immunity and place vulnerable children at increased risk of preventable, and sometimes life-threatening, diseases.

The Science is Clear: Vaccination is Safe and Effective.

Decades of rigorous scientific research and extensive clinical trials have unequivocally demonstrated the safety and efficacy of vaccines. These medical advancements have been instrumental in eradicating or significantly reducing the incidence of once-common and devastating childhood diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella, polio, and pertussis (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024a). The overwhelming scientific consensus supports the use of vaccines as a cornerstone of public health (National Academy of Medicine, 2013).

Erosion of Herd Immunity Poses a Significant Public Health Risk.

Herd immunity, the protection conferred upon susceptible individuals when a significant proportion of the population is immune to a disease, is crucial for protecting those who cannot be vaccinated due to medical reasons, such as infants, immunocompromised children, and individuals undergoing certain medical treatments

(Fine et al., 2011). Allowing non-medical exemptions weakens this protective barrier, making our schools and communities more vulnerable to outbreaks (Omer et al., 2011).

Even a small decrease in vaccination rates can lead to a resurgence of preventable diseases. Outbreaks not only endanger the health of unvaccinated children but also disrupt the educational environment, strain school resources, and potentially lead to serious complications, hospitalizations, and even death (Salmon et al., 2015). Recent measles outbreaks in communities with lower vaccination rates serve as stark reminders of this risk (CDC, 2024b).

School Nurses are on the Front Lines of Disease Prevention.

School nurses are highly trained healthcare professionals who play a vital role in promoting the health and safety of students. We are responsible for managing communicable diseases, educating families about the benefits of vaccination, and implementing protocols to prevent the spread of illness within our schools. The existence of non-medical exemptions creates significant challenges for school nurses as we strive to maintain a healthy and safe learning environment for all students. It adds complexity to disease surveillance, contact tracing, and outbreak management.

Non-Medical Exemptions Disproportionately Impact Vulnerable Populations.

Children with underlying health conditions are particularly susceptible to the severe complications of vaccine-preventable diseases. Allowing non-medical exemptions creates an inequitable situation where the health of these vulnerable students is put at risk due to the choices of others. Schools should be environments where all children can learn and thrive without fear of preventable illness (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016).

The Maine Association of School Nurses firmly believes that the health and safety of all school children must be prioritized. While we respect individual beliefs, we maintain that the collective well-being of the school community outweighs individual philosophical or religious objections to vaccination, especially when those objections are not grounded in legitimate medical contraindications.

Therefore, the Maine Association of School Nurses strongly urges the [Relevant Legislative Committee/Body] to reject any measures that would allow for religious or philosophical exemptions to mandatory school vaccinations. We believe that eliminating these non-medical exemptions is a crucial step in protecting the health of our students, maintaining the integrity of our public health system, and

ensuring a safe and healthy learning environment for all children in Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our perspective. We are available to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

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