

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

Date: April 9, 2025

Submitted by: Angie Buker, MSN, RN, NCSN

Regarding: Opposition to LD 174 and LD 727

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I am writing today to express my strong opposition to both LD 174, "An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements," and LD 727, "An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools." Both of these bills, if enacted, would pose a significant threat to the health and safety of our communities, particularly our children, and would undermine the progress Maine has made in protecting public health.

Opposition to LD 174: Restoring Religious Exemptions

LD 174 seeks to reinstate religious exemptions to Maine's immunization requirements for school attendance. This would reverse the will of the legislature and the clear scientific consensus that widespread vaccination is the most effective way to prevent the spread of dangerous and potentially deadly infectious diseases.

Allowing non-medical exemptions based on religious beliefs erodes the herd immunity that protects vulnerable individuals who cannot be vaccinated due to medical reasons, such as infants too young for vaccination or individuals with compromised immune systems. When vaccination rates decline, these individuals are put at increased risk of contracting preventable diseases like measles, mumps, rubella, and pertussis.

The history of infectious disease outbreaks clearly demonstrates the consequences of low vaccination rates. We have seen resurgences of diseases, such as measles, that were once largely controlled when exemptions were more prevalent. Restoring religious exemptions would inevitably lead to more outbreaks in our schools and communities, placing a strain on our healthcare system and endangering lives.

Furthermore, the notion of a "religious exemption" in this context is often based on personal interpretations rather than established tenets of major religions. Public health policy should be grounded in scientific evidence, not individual philosophical or spiritual beliefs that may not align with the broader community's well-being.

Opposition to LD 727: Repealing Certain Immunization Requirements

LD 727 goes even further by seeking to repeal certain existing immunization requirements for schools altogether. This bill represents an even more radical and dangerous approach to public health. Eliminating immunization requirements would dismantle the very foundation of our efforts to protect children and the community from preventable diseases.

If LD 727 were to pass, Maine would become a haven for infectious diseases, putting our children at extreme risk. Schools, as centers of close contact, are prime environments for the rapid spread of contagious illnesses. Removing the requirement for vaccination would undoubtedly lead to widespread outbreaks, school closures, increased healthcare costs, and potentially severe health consequences for our children.

The overwhelming scientific and medical consensus is clear: vaccines are safe and effective. They have dramatically reduced the incidence of serious childhood diseases and have saved countless lives. To repeal immunization requirements in the face of this evidence is irresponsible and would be a grave disservice to the health and well-being of all Mainers.

Conclusion

Both LD 174 and LD 727 pose a direct threat to the public health of Maine. Restoring religious exemptions and repealing existing immunization requirements would lower vaccination rates, increase the risk of preventable disease outbreaks, and endanger the most vulnerable members of our society.

I urge this committee to reject both LD 174 and LD 727 and to uphold Maine's commitment to protecting public health through evidence-based immunization policies. The health and safety of our children and communities depend on it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Angie Buker, MSN, RN, NCSN