



### **Testimony in Support of LD 1461:**

**“An Act to Prohibit School Boards from Implementing or Enforcing Mask Mandates”**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Harris Van Pate, and I serve as policy analyst for Maine Policy Institute. Maine Policy is a free-market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 1461, “An Act to Prohibit School Boards from Implementing or Enforcing Mask Mandates.”

LD 1461 aligns with the principles of individual liberty, personal responsibility, and transparent governance by ensuring that school boards do not infringe on the fundamental rights of students, parents, and staff, and by not mandating the use of face masks within individual educational environments.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, mask mandates were implemented in schools to protect public health. However, after having had ample time to reflect and evaluate, it is clear that such mandates were often made without sufficient regard for their negative impact on students’ social, emotional, and academic development. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many experts expressed concern that mandatory masking policies contributed to communication barriers, learning loss, and heightened anxiety among children.<sup>1 2</sup> These issues are particularly acute among students with disabilities, those learning English as a second language, and young learners developing critical speech and social skills.

Moreover, the decision to mask should rest with individuals and families, not government bodies. Parents—not bureaucrats—are the most appropriate decision-makers for the health and welfare of their children. Imposing universal mask mandates disregards the diversity of medical, psychological, and developmental needs among students. Additionally, a Cornell University analysis in 2023 found that there was no consistent relationship between schools’ mask mandates and local infection rates.<sup>3</sup> A top-down approach fails to recognize the principle of informed, voluntary choice in health care and personal risk assessment.

Government-mandated masking also sets a troubling precedent for future overreach. Allowing school boards the authority to mandate masks normalizes the idea that

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/19/charities-fear-impact-of-masks-on-deaf-children-in-uk-schools>

<sup>2</sup> <https://today.usc.edu/masks-affect-how-kids-and-parents-read-emotions-usc-brain-research-finds/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://arxiv.org/abs/2307.11974>



temporary public health concerns can justify permanent erosion of personal freedom. We must guard against the expansion of government control into deeply personal areas of life, especially in matters of bodily autonomy and parental authority.

LD 1461 draws a responsible line against future encroachments by making it clear: Maine's children and families are not subject to blanket policies that ignore their unique circumstances. It upholds the constitutional values of liberty and respects the diversity of thought and choice that is foundational to a free society.

For these reasons, Maine Policy Institute strongly supports LD 1461 and respectfully urges this committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on this critical legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration.