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## Testimony against LD 1461 by Sydney R. Sewall, MD MPH (Hallowell)

Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural affairs committee:

I am writing as a representative of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, an organization of over 300 health care practitioners who specialize in the care of children and adolescents. I personally have 40+ years of experience treating kids in the Central Maine area.

The COVID experience was our first run-in with a mask mandate, and it certainly led to frustration and anger. Kids were first told to mask, then were told that cloth masks were inadequate. As the pandemic wound down, we were all told to use good masks for an oft-changing number of days or weeks after contracting COVID or being exposed. These confusing recommendations were based on some degree of science, along with a fair amount of guesswork (which scientists call "extrapolation") applying the limited clinical evidence available.

One issue that wasn't addressed until later was the downside of mask use in schools. Speech gets muffled and teachers are more difficult to understand -- interfering with learning. Some kids feel anxious wearing them. Studies did suggest marginal benefit, but when I worked in a high school in 2020-21 I observed only half of the students using decent mask technique and minimizing leakage.

Given the historical record, I find it very unlikely that any school board would independently mandate mask use -- so this bill serves no real purpose. Situations could arise at some distant point, however, where the state or national CDC might again recommend masking as a way to lower the spread of disease in some future pandemic. As the Federal CDC website states:

***"When worn by a person with an infection, masks reduce the spread of the virus to others. Masks can also protect wearers from breathing in infectious particles from people around them. Different masks offer different levels of protection. Wearing the most protective one you can comfortably wear for extended periods of time that fits well (completely covering the nose and mouth) is the most effective option."***

As stated above, there is no plausible scenario where a local school board would take it on themselves to issue a mask mandate. Given the COVID experience, a state or national public health authority would only consider a mandate if we faced a new **extreme** disease outbreak -- and then only after balancing benefits with the downside of their use. Masks are an imperfect tool, but they still might be needed to save lives.

While we all hope we never see that day, it would be unwise to throw out this tool. I urge the committee to vote an "ought not to pass" on LD 1461.

Sincerely,

  
Sydney R. Sewall, MD MPH  
Instructor in Pediatrics, MDFMR