

April 1, 2023

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the committee,

My name is Martha Bell and I am a mother of two children who will be directly impacted by your vote. Therefore, I am asking for your support in passing LD 51.

In September of 2021, schools across Maine lost students because of the elimination of philosophical and religious vaccine exemptions, including RSU 29 in Houlton which lost our two children. They had both been in public school since they were in pre-K, while our rights to bodily autonomy were honored. Our children were forced to leave the most interpersonal and only academic environment they had ever known. This has negatively impacted their social and emotional well-being. While we have put in great effort to keep them engaged, most of their interaction is now through electronic devices. As a result, their relationships have deteriorated over time. It is my hope that you will take into consideration the well-being of the children being removed from classrooms.

We have seen first-hand how ineffective the current law has been over the past two years. The intent to enforce vaccines for all or to separate the vaccinated from unvaccinated children has not been accomplished. For example, both of our children still engage in non-school sponsored sports programs which utilize public school gymnasiums and play against public school students from other towns across the state of Maine. Our children are human beings that still interact in the communities and state in which they live so isolating them from the school day has negatively impacted school enrollment and the well-being of the students being removed. Again, the current law is not effective!

Our kids have experienced firsthand what discrimination is like. Due to their high academic scores, they have had to try and understand how students with IEP's are able to attend school with exemptions, while they are told they are no longer allowed to be a part of their school. By continuing to allow this to happen, you are supporting a law that discriminates against children like mine. Will you stand up for them?

We have learned through the recent pandemic that it is not in a child's best interest to be educated while isolated. I am asking you to stand up for what is right. Not only is this critically important for the students being affected now, but THIS IS THE TIME, to stand up and do what is best for generations to come.

Please support LD 51 today, it is vital for our children and to the future of education in Maine.

Gratefully,

Martha Bell