

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the committee. I am asking you today to **PASS** BILL LD 51.

My name is Pam Barnickel. I'm a registered nurse certified in hospice and palliative nursing. I've worked for 13 years throughout southern Maine caring for thousands of patients at the end of their lives.

I worked throughout 2020 during the first year of the pandemic, however, I have been unable to work the last 2 years since the vaccine mandate came out in early 2021.

It's hard for me to stand before you today without deep frustration and disbelief that my job was taken from me because I chose to exercise MY OWN patient autonomy.

The definition of patient or medical autonomy is the right of patients to make decisions about their medical care without their health care provider trying to influence their decision. Whether a doctor or family member believes otherwise, my job is to compassionately and firmly be the voice of my patient when they are sick and unable to speak on their behalf. Many times they are also very scared. They need someone to represent their end of life wishes. Regardless of what I think, I REPRESENT THEM.

I believe MY OWN MEDICAL AUTONOMY is just as sacred. Isn't yours? In the same way that I've stood firm for my patients rights, I had to stand firm for my own health and well being. At this time there is no advocacy or protection for those of us seeking philosophical or religious exemption from vaccines.

This right to choose what I believe is best for my body has cost me my job.

We could debate patients rights for days, but simply stated, each and every person has the right to choose what they believe is best for their body WITHOUT pressure AND consequence for their choices.

I haven't worked in TWO YEARS because of the vaccine mandate for healthcare workers. This has significantly cost me, AND those for whom I care for.

It is a well known fact there is a national nursing shortage which has only increased since these vaccine mandates to healthcare workers.

Should a patient's physical and emotional needs come before a bureaucratic body who are removed from those suffering when they enact laws which put those dying at greater risk of suffering?

Here at the state capital are you aware of the far reaching effects this loss of exemption has upon elders, children, and those at end of life? Are you aware of the multi layered consequences the loss of exemption rights has cost nurses, patients and their families?

My "place of work" is in private homes and nursing facilities as families struggle with providing appropriate and necessary medical attention as they say good bye to their loved ones. My job is to ensure the most compassionate care in my patient's last days.

I have witnessed first hand when someone needlessly suffers in their last days. Because of this, compassionate and competent nurses are needed everywhere in healthcare, especially at the sacred place of the end of one's life.

Mahatma Ghandi said "the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats it's most vulnerable members."

I leave you with this quote..."When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened."

So I tell you today with many brave Mainer's who are boldly saying BILL LD 51 NEEDS TO PASS.

Pam Barnickel RN BSN CHPN