

Testimony in support of LD 51- Tiffany Kreck of Ellsworth Maine

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, I am here today to urge the passage of LD 51.

I have thought a lot this week, but what I would say to you today. I have written, and re-written this testimony at least a dozen times. I considered telling you about my son's experience with vaccine injury, or the inability to now retain a medical exemption for his sister. I considered telling you about homeschooling in our home, and how we have struggled to find our footing. But no matter what I could stand here and tell you about us, the fact of the matter is we are the lucky ones.

So, rather, let me tell you about Maine. The Maine that most of you don't get to see. When the implementation of LD 798 approached in Sept. 2021 there was already a lot of confusion it seemed. Who it applied to, who it didn't, which schedules applied to who. In the confusion, we inadvertently became the safety net for more families, and more Mainers, than I can even count.

So I would like to tell you about the family that called us, because their child had a rare disease that required the care of a specialist at Boston Children's. The kind of Specialist that doesn't even exist here in Maine. This family had held a legitimate Medical Exemption for years, granted by a more than qualified physician. But in the fall of 2021, this family's exemption was denied and the child had to leave the school.

Several families living along the State line, all of which had long standing relationships with their PCP's in New Hampshire, have since been removed from school in Maine because the legitimate advice of their medical professionals were not acceptable to the School.

While 798 was meant with the best of intentions, the real world impact has fallen flat. Not only flat, it has, is, and will continue to have a real and harmful affect on families in Maine. We have essentially charged School Nurses with the responsibility to ruthlessly root out any student who may be even one booster shy of compliance. Even if they should have been protected under the original provisions in 798. In one instance one school Nurse investigated to such a detail that she determined the author of a child's Medical exemption had the right license in the wrong state and the wrong license in the correct state.

I'd rather tell you about multiple students across Maine that had received most of the required schedule. So in fall of 2021, they returned to school using positive laboratory proof. I.E. Titers. That was until fall of 2022, when the definition of acceptable Titers was changed on a FAQ sheet and sent out to schools for arbitrary enforcement. So fall of 2022, using positive immunity for the second year in a row, another group of students were removed from Maine Schools. One of these students was a High School Senior working through his last year to graduation.

We are now beginning to see special needs families, with appropriately date IEPs, that by all rights should be protected under the provisions that 798 provided. One little boy in particular, is a little boy so special that even his teachers tried to beg that he be allowed to stay in school. And this is only skimming the surface on the fallout for children. This hasn't begun to touch the young adults that have left the State because College close to home in Maine was not an option. And this doesn't even approach the very real issue happening across Healthcare, especially in rural areas.

We have received phone calls from folks that needed emergency care, but when they arrived at the Hospitals they received anything but. I've spoken to the families of Stroke victims that have been sent home without the proper treatments simply for lack of staff and ability.

I have spoken to multiple Mainers that reside in rural areas that have turned off their defibrillators, for fear that there would be no emergency response if it were to go off.

I spoke to a woman whose Mother died, because the ambulance was more than 45 minutes away, because the local department had been terminated.

Multiple Paramedics my Organization is now representing, have lost everything from homes to marriages and what's worse is their communities were no better off without them.

These are the faces and families of a failed and harmful policy. And while it may be important as a legislature to try things, it is also equally important to acknowledge when something doesn't work the way we intended. And you all today have the opportunity to right this wrong, and pass LD 51.