

Courtney Ampezzan
North Yarmouth
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Regarding LD 51 - An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements and LD 1098 - An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions

Senator Rafferty and esteemed committee on education and cultural affairs members: My name is Courtney Ampezzan, and I am a resident of North Yarmouth. I am here today as an extremely vulnerable and concerned citizen to testify in emphatic opposition to LD 51 and LD 1098.

I am here today at great personal risk. I suffer from an ultra-rare primary immunodeficiency which has disabled me my entire life. I will spare you the details of my disability, but by being here, I am exposing myself to the risk of severe illness. So then, why am I here? I am here because I want you to remember my face and to hear the fear in my voice as I beg you to please oppose LD 51 and LD 1098. These proposals are centered around personal choice. I am not opposed to personal choice, and I fully support choice and autonomy when the scope of those decisions doesn't negatively impact other people. If people were allowed religious and philosophical exemptions to the immunization requirements it would have direct and severe consequences for the most vulnerable people in the community. These exemptions are not about choice and freedom, for me, it is potentially a matter of life and death.

This issue has already been debated and decided. LD 798 was passed and supported by the majority of voters in every county. The benefits of vaccination are undeniable - they prevent serious diseases and save lives. Being up to date on required vaccines is part of a moral and ethical obligation to care for oneself and the greater community. If the law were to be reversed to allow non-medical exemptions it would increase the number of unvaccinated people, which would put the entire community at risk for unnecessary and potentially deadly outbreaks of preventable diseases.

My entire life is consumed with calculating the risks of exposure to infection or disease and honestly, it is exhausting. When LD 798 passed I cried, not because "we won" but because it meant our state would be just a little safer for everyone, especially for people like me. When more people are vaccinated around me, known as herd immunity, it decreases my exposure to illness and increases my chances of living.

Thinking about life and living weighs very heavily on my heart. I don't know much time I have left as every day passes my health deteriorates, but I do know that as long as I am here, I will continue to advocate for the health and safety of my community. So today, I am here using my voice to respectfully beg the Committee to vote "ought not to pass" on LD 51 and LD 1098.

Thank you for your time this morning and your continued commitment to affording all Mainers equitable access to a safe and healthy community.