

Good morning Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Committee on education and Cultural Affairs.

My name is Brandie Rubin and I am a Registered Nurse from Scarborough. I am here today to testify against LD 51, LD 1098, and LD 1209. I am speaking today on my own behalf and do not represent any organization. These bills seek to undo the progress we have made in Maine in terms of vaccine exemptions. In 2019, I joined a group of medical professionals and concerned parents to make schools safer against vaccine preventable illnesses. On March 3, 2020, Maine citizens voted overwhelmingly in support of LD 798, now PL 154, which eliminated religious and philosophical exemptions from school-required vaccines. As a result, exemption rates in Maine have dropped to safe levels, protecting our children from dangerous vaccine-preventable diseases.

Vaccines are vital to our society, and the recent Measles outbreak in Ohio just this past February, have shown us the danger of low vaccination rates. This outbreak resulted in 85 children being infected, most of which were unvaccinated, and 34 of them were hospitalized. An exemption rate of just 5% is all that is needed to allow dangerous measles outbreaks to occur. Before PL 154, many school districts were at risk. Now those ~~vaccination~~ ^{exemption} rates have decreased to the point where schools are safe from outbreaks again. It is important to note that medical exemptions are still being utilized in our state to ensure that students who cannot receive vaccines for medical reasons are still protected. Furthermore, this shows how important herd immunity is to ensure that these students are properly protected. All Maine students have the right to an education, and it is not fair for one family's choice to put other children at risk. Those who are in support of the resumption of the philosophical and religious exemptions would like you to believe that medical exemptions are difficult to obtain, but this simply is not true.

As healthcare professionals, we are exhausted from the misinformation that has been perpetuated by some politicians over the past 3 years. Our healthcare system is at the brink, and we cannot afford to deal with continued outbreaks, especially those of which are preventable with vaccines.

The citizens of Maine have spoken, with 73% of voters supporting PL 154. It is time for our representatives to listen to their constituents and keep our current vaccine law as it is. We must protect our children, our healthcare system, and our society as a whole.

Thank you.