

Testimony of Maura Pillsbury in Opposition to

- LD 51 - An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements
- LD 869 - An Act to Protect Education Access by Prohibiting a Mandate for Schoolchildren for a COVID-19 Vaccine or a Vaccine Under an Emergency Use Authorization
- LD 1098 - An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions Regarding Immunization Requirements
- LD 1148 - An Act to Prohibit COVID-19 Vaccine Mandates for Students Enrolled in Public Institutions of Learning
- LD 1209 - An Act to Reinstate the Religious and Philosophical Vaccine Exemptions for Private Schools and Virtual Public Charter Schools
- LD 1228 - An Act to Prohibit Certain Higher Education Institutions from Requiring Vaccines Approved Under Emergency Use Authorization for Admission or Attendance

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Maura Pillsbury and I am a resident of Freeport. I oppose all six of the bills related to vaccination before you today.

I am a former member of a vaccine hesitant private school community. For several years, my children's private school failed to report its vaccination rates to the state. Upon my inquiries, they told me the opt out rate was 15 percent. The following year to my astonishment, Maine CDC published in a report that 40 percent of my child's kindergarten class was not vaccinated. I felt betrayed by a community I had trusted to protect my family, including my baby, who was too young to be vaccinated. I knew we also had parents and students who had compromised immune systems or were undergoing cancer treatment. Simply put, our school community failed to protect its most vulnerable members, exposing them to unnecessary risk. We didn't know when we selected this school that we were entering a vaccine-hesitant community.

Thanks to PL 154, we have successfully increased school vaccination rates in Maine, meaning decreased risk that disease will spread in our schools. There were cases of chicken pox in both the private school and the daycare my children attended. Students lose a minimum of three weeks of instructional time when an outbreak of disease such as chicken pox or whooping cough occurs. Vaccine hesitant private school communities create pockets of high vaccine opt-outs that have the ability to affect dozens of other communities because students may reside across many other towns. There is simply no reason to exempt private schools from the same vaccination requirements as public schools when they may present an even greater risk due to their potentially high opt-out rates. Please protect the safety of students in Maine's private schools and surrounding communities by opposing LD 1098 and LD 1209.

We all deserve safe schools and communities, free from the threat of disease. LD 51, LD 1098, and LD 1209 would undo the step forward we took during the 129th legislature by passing PL 154, which was overwhelmingly upheld by Mainers at the polls. I also oppose LD 869, LD 1148, and LD 1228 because there is already an established rulemaking process for revising vaccine schedules, and I do not believe the legislature should be passing laws pertaining to specific vaccines. Thank you for your time.