

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Educations & Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Shannon Wallace, I'm from Oakland and I am testifying in SUPPORT of LD51. I also SUPPORT LD869, LD1098, LD1148, LD1209, and LD1228.

Over the last few years we have been given a clear view of what happens when children are not allowed to go to school and parents are not able to work. There has been emotional and physical turmoil in our children and increased rates of suicide, depression and anxiety. Once thriving students and student-athletes not being able to participate in the classes, sports and activities that they love and that motivate them. Family financial situations changed drastically because one parent had to stay home with the kids. And let's not forget the single parent homes. The only income earner now unable to work because they had to educate their children. I'm sure this sounds familiar to everyone...except I'm not talking about the pandemic. I'm talking about the thousands of kids in Maine who are being denied access to daycare, public, private and online k-12 schools, college, school sports, and other extracurricular school programs because of the removal of the religious and philosophical exemptions. I'm also talking about the untold number of parents and other adults who either lost their jobs or had to leave their jobs to educate their children because of the removal of these exemptions.

My family is one of those impacted, financially and educationally.

Studies show the emotional impact the pandemic had on our children. One study done here in Maine found, "Loneliness predicted higher depressive symptoms for all adolescents..."

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35259031/>

The children barred from school in Maine due to the removal of these exemptions are experiencing the same loneliness and distress now. The other kids have gone back to school but these children are still suffering the effects. Those who voted to remove these exemptions have shown no concern for the mental health of these children or adults. You have shown no concern for the financial impacts it has had on us. The State has turned its back on all of us.

This exclusion is having a negative impact on adults and children in Maine... mentally, physically and financially. You have an opportunity now to show them their wellbeing matters too. The risks to their lives and livelihood outweighs the intended benefits. It's time to do the right thing.

Religious freedom should again be honored in Maine. Reinstate the exemption.

Philosophical exemptions should again be honored in Maine. There is no one size fits all in medicine. Many who used philosophical exemptions had medical reasons for doing so. We have a right to informed consent and the medical establishment has an ethical and legal obligation to provide it...free from coercion. They are not required to agree with us, therefore we should not need them to sign off on our informed medical decision. Reinstate the exemption.

The State is implying parents still have a "choice" while only giving one avenue to access an education...vaccinate fully, no exceptions. That is not a choice. That is healthy children being denied an education of their choosing. Being forced to homeschool is not the same as choosing to homeschool and no one should be put in that position.

Please vote Ought to Pass.