

Good afternoon Chairmen Rafferty and Brennan and Committee Members,

My name is Jerry Dodge.

My family has been severely and adversely affected by the removal of philosophical and religious exemptions to vaccinations.

My wife lost her job in the healthcare field because she was denied the ability to file a religious exemption. In a period when we have a severe health care staff shortage, it makes little sense to prohibit someone who wishes to work the ability to do so. The facility in Maine she left has yet to fill her position and that was nearly two years ago. She now works in NH.

Only after years researching the pros and cons did my wife and I make an informed decision to not vaccinate our three children.

My daughter - recognized as one of the top ten students at Fryeburg Academy - was forced to leave Maine to attend college. She will never return, she will never raise a family here. The lack of medical freedom in Maine makes that an impossibility.

We went to the Maine Connections Academy website to sign them up for remote school. The site had an entire section dedicated to the adherence to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 dealing with anti-discrimination. Listed were the numerous categories of students it would never deny an education. It would never discriminate based on color, ethnicity, religion, physical or mental disability, age, marital status, gender identity, sexual orientation, or immigration status. The one group they do discriminate against, the one group they do deny an education? The unvaccinated child. My boys were denied access to online public education through a program that would have been conducted in our home at our kitchen table.

My family doesn't live in a bubble, we go to the supermarket, the movies, the beach, the library, we shop at the mall, we eat at restaurants, etc. My sons go to their friends' houses, sleepovers, camping trips, etc. We can do anything within the towns and state we live in. Yet my wife is denied access to employment and my children are denied access to an education.

People have said, "There is no mandate, you have a choice, you can home school." To a teenage boy whose only desire is to attend HS with his friends and play baseball for his school, this is not a choice.

All they want is to be able to attend high school and elementary school with their friends and to play baseball for their school. They are denied both opportunities.

I ask you to stand up for the rights of my wife to go back to work in Maine. I ask you to please stand up for the rights of my children to get an education here in Maine.

Please reinstate philosophical and religious exemptions to vaccinations. Please support LD 51 / LD 1098.

Thank you.
Jerry Dodge
Denmark