

Testimony for LD 51: An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions
Sponsored by Representative Gary Drinkwater

As a Maine resident, health professional, and parent I couldn't be happier to provide a testimony in regards to how LD798 and LD51 have impacted my family and financial profile. My name is Jess Higgins Kelley, I'm an oncology nutritionist, journalist, author of two published books on cancer and European biological medicine, and now run a school training medical doctors and oncologists globally on cancer prevention and management through the use of nutrition and lifestyle medicine. I've been working on forefront of natural health research for fifteen years, and I became a mom in 2013.

Our daughter's birth was not as magical as many are, she was a meconium aspirate and was life flighted to Denver Children's Hospital where she intubated and on IV antibiotics for the first eight days of her life. There were also several critical neurotransmitter and cardiac markers that were off and it was a very traumatic beginning especially with little data out there about long-term health outcomes in the meconium aspirate population.

After our first week in the NICU we returned home to Durango, Colorado where we lived to start parenting. Our daughter was, for the most part, healthy but was plagued by a young age with recurrent infections. She was also identified as having gross motor delays for which we were referred for pediatric PT. Her ability for cardiovascular activities has always been impaired. In my professional world, I had been running genetic tests on myself and my husband's family (in addition to our client population) in order to be clear on genetic profiles which is a key piece of personalized medicine. Several genetic SNPs including those present in CYP enzymes and MTHFR indicate that metabolism of certain toxins like those in vaccination adjuvants could be problematic for our daughter. Further, the rates of certain childhood cancers have increased over 35% in the past 40 years right alongside the increases in required pediatric vaccinations. Because of all these factors, we felt sure that there was certainly enough medical reason to delay vaccinations, and our daughter's primary medical care doctor that she had been seeing since age 1 week old, agreed.

I grew up in Maine, I'm Yarmouth Clipper class of 1996, and my family has lived in Maine my whole life. When our daughter was 4 we moved here from Colorado (where I went for college and grad school) back to Maine because it is such a wonderful place to grow up. Then when LD798 happened, it meant that we needed to travel back to Durango every year to get the medical exemption letter from our trusted and long-term primary care doctor, which was not much a problem as we have family there anywhere. Then in September 2022 we were informed by the school that out of state medical exemptions were no longer accepted and we had 90 days to establish with a new primary care doctor and either get an exemption letter or catch-up schedule. Remember, this is COVID time and no doctor was writing an exemption for anyone for anything and so I drug my daughter from doctor to doctor spending thousands of dollars and to no avail. We even flew to Colorado as we do every year to get another letter. None if it was accepted and in December she was basically kicked out of public school. We were then able to jump into a private school half way through the year (which is not ideal for young kids) but it

worked out until they too would no longer accept our out of state medical exemption and so she was kicked out of another school.

Pushed against a wall, in the summer of 2022 I made the difficult decision to sell my consulting company, taking a huge financial loss, hiring private tutors in order to homeschool this year. I'm glad I listened to my maternal instincts as further testing over the winter proved another significant marker in my daughter's immune function and had we moved forward with a vaccination schedule she was a high risker of side effects. It should be a parent's choice what medical interventions they want for their child.

In the meantime, as a tax paying business owner in the state of Maine I've lost over \$75,000 in income in the past year, while paid over \$5,000 in property taxes toward the school my daughter can't attend. It's hard not to ask why we don't just move back to Colorado, despite the fact I grew up here and we wanted to raise our kids here. It has been psychologically hard on my daughter and us a family to through the educational challenges of COVID and seeing the critical window of learning to read and write passing her by, then seeing her unable to attend school while her reading ability continues to fall behind.

In summary, we feel that if a child has an established and documented relationship with an out of state physician, the State of Maine should recognize and accept a medical exemption letter from vaccinations from them and also reinstate religious and philosophical exemptions. Maine is only one of three states with this mandate. It's time to think about the best interest of Maine children.

Thank-you,

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