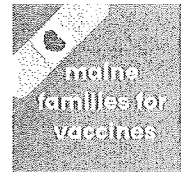


## Testimony in opposition to LD 59, LD 172, LD 601, LD 1382, LD 1547, & LD 1598

April 24th, 2023



Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Northe Saunders, and I'm a resident of Portland. I'm a leader of Maine Families for Vaccines, the organization that supported the passage of stronger vaccine laws for school entry in 2019. We also successfully stopped the referendum to overturn that law, which was one of the most lopsided in our State's history, with 72.8% of Maine voters supporting strong, pro-vaccine laws.

These six bills would undermine our progress in protecting Maine people. They sow doubt in our public health system, sow distrust in science and modern medicine, and sow doubt in the professionals we rely on to keep our communities safe. These bills are based on misinformation about vaccines. Vaccines are safe, effective, and necessary for good public health. Maine has safely administered over 3,266,862 COVID-19 vaccines to more than 76% of our population. Claims about significant adverse side effects have not been substantiated by the data. Maine's response to the pandemic was one of the best in the country.

This group of bills would have severe consequences for the health of our state and Maine residents. They could significantly increase the costs to Maine taxpayers, businesses, and our healthcare system. Covid-19 is a serious disease. An unvaccinated Mainer is 8 times more likely to be hospitalized than someone who is vaccinated, at an average cost of \$71,036 for noncomplex cases and \$302,704 for complex cases. In addition, they would reduce Maine's ability to respond to future disease outbreaks.

I help organize Maine Families for Vaccines for one reason. I have a young family with three children aged 7, 6, and 3. I want to keep them and our community safe from preventable diseases. When the legislature strengthened our vaccine laws in 2019, my daughter Katharine, who was three years old, knew then that vaccines are safe and effective. When she started Kindergarten this past fall at Longfellow Elementary in Portland, I felt proud of the work that I have done with Maine Families for Vaccines. I had seen the data. The proof was in the science. Our schools were now safer from preventable diseases. Parents had to worry less about an outbreak of disease shutting down schools. The knock-on effect of a vaccine-preventable disease outbreak can cost hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars. Not only do our kids and family get sick, our economy also suffers.

The maxim rings true: As Maine goes, so goes the nation. Our state is a leader in public health. All of the vaccine bills under consideration today would increase risk and put our communities in danger. Let's not go backward. On behalf of Maine Families for Vaccines, our thousands of supporters across the state, and the overwhelming majority of Mainers who support strong vaccine laws but cannot be here, I ask for your opposition to all of the vaccine bills being heard today.

Thank you for your consideration and time. I welcome any questions and would be happy to provide any more information you need.

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