

Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH

IN Opposition to LD 1598 and LD 1382

An Act to Allow an Exception to Immunization Requirements for Health Care Workers for Vaccines Approved Under Emergency Use Authorization

Sponsored by Senator Harold Stewart

&

An Act to Establish Guiding Public Health Principles of Focused Protection for Pandemics of a Highly Infectious Respiratory Disease

Sponsored by Senator Eric Brakey

Before the Health and Human Affairs Committee, April 24, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and Members of the Committee, my name is Lani Graham I am a former Chief Public health Officer for Maine. I serve on the Public Health Committee of the Maine Medical Association. I live in Freeport. I am here in opposition to LD's 1598 & 1382. Both bills constitute real threats to the health of Maine people.

Despite the misinformation widely circulating about the Covid-19 vaccines approved through the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) Emergency Authorization plan, the data is indisputable. A careful scientific study conducted from December 2020 to November 2022, indicated that use of the Covid vaccines saved over 3 million American lives, averted about 18 million hospitalizations, and prevented about 119 million infections.¹ It can scarcely be overestimated how much those savings meant to American families and our economy. Of course, this towering success did not come risk free. But overall, risks were very low and were balanced by the benefits attained.

As we certainly discovered, when a pandemic strikes, time is of the essence. The FDA Emergency Authorization was essential to the benefits described. In addition, had the people who resisted

¹ <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2022/two-years-covid-vaccines-prevented-millions-deaths-hospitalizations>

immunization with the Covid vaccine been vaccinated, it is estimated that over 300,000 lives could have been saved.² That is a tragic number to consider. People died due to misinformation and fear, feelings that these two bills feed. At a time when public health should be celebrated, it is being attacked.

With specific reference to LD 1598, the one group that absolutely must be as safe as possible is health care workforce who have direct contact with sick patients. Isn't it critical to make sure that people who care for the sick do not make their patients even more ill by passing on a deadly disease? Even during Covid, no health care worker was forced to take the vaccine. It was just that there were certain jobs they could not do. And Emergency Authorization is not undertaken lightly, only in the face of real need for fast action as was the case with the Covid Vaccine.

With specific reference to LD 1382, the best of it is already in action as a natural part of public health, but the bulk of the bill is extremely dangerous to public health action. One element (F) is particularly egregious. Public health is specifically directed to populations. In fact, public health might be called "population health". This element prohibits required actions directed to populations, actions that might be needed without delay. Coercion is always the last stop for public health, but sometimes is needed. Occasionally we are all required to do things we may not wish to do in the interest of others. And a pandemic is just the environment where such actions must sometimes be taken swiftly to save lives. LD 1382 could prevent that and lives would be lost.

I hope you will vote both these bills ought not to pass.

Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

² <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2022/05/13/1098071284/this-is-how-many-lives-could-have-been-saved-with-covid-vaccinations-in-each-sta>