

LD 389: State-Sponsored Misinformation

How COVID Review Commissions Became a Platform for Anti-Vaccine Propaganda

In recent years, several U.S. states have established COVID-19 review commissions that have been criticized for promoting anti-vaccine sentiments and disseminating misinformation. Notable examples include:

Arizona: In May 2023, Arizona convened the "Novel Coronavirus Southwestern Intergovernmental Committee," comprising state legislators and sponsored by organizations like RFK Jr.'s Children's Health Defense. The committee featured speakers who propagated unfounded claims linking vaccines to autism and other health issues. The event was characterized by the promotion of unproven treatments and the dissemination of conspiracy theories, leading to concerns about the spread of misinformation.

New Hampshire: New Hampshire established a legislative committee to review the state's pandemic response. However, the committee faced criticism for inviting speakers known for anti-vaccine views and for providing a platform to disseminate misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. This approach raised alarms among public health experts about the potential undermining of vaccination efforts.

Louisiana: A state commission was formed to assess COVID-19 policies. Similar to other states, this commission included members who expressed skepticism about vaccines and public health measures. The commission's proceedings were marked by debates over vaccine efficacy and government mandates, reflecting broader national divisions on these issues.

DEATH BY PROTOCOL

ARIZONA REPUBLICANS EMBRACE QANON WITH QUACK COVID HEARING

A new committee has adopted a hashtag from the conspiracy theory's followers, and is holding a two-day anti-vax circus at the state Capitol

By JIM DICKINSON
MAY 15, 2023



AZMIRROR

Senate COVID hearing light on facts, heavy on misinformation

The QAnon-tinged two-day hearing featured a stream of conspiracy theories and debunked claims

By JEROD MACDONALD-EVOY · MAY 25, 2023 · 6:23 PM



House Special Committee on COVID Response Efficacy (05/16/2024)



LOUISIANA ILLUMINATOR

Fact-check: Anti-vax proponents dominate legislative hearing on COVID response

GOHSEP director confirms FEMA inquiry into New Orleans' overflow facility

By WESLEY MULLER · SEPTEMBER 26, 2024 · 10:57 AM



State of Maine | 132nd Legislature

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Testimony of Northe Saunders on behalf of Maine Families for Vaccines and SAFE Communities Coalition

March 24, 2025

Oppose: LD 389

Resolve, to Increase Transparency and Evaluate Emergency Response Through a COVID-19 Review Commission

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Northe Saunders, and I serve as the Director of Maine Families for Vaccines and Executive Director of SAFE Communities Coalition. Our work centers on building confidence in vaccines, supporting strong public health infrastructure, and ensuring that Maine families are protected from preventable disease.

Let me start by saying clearly: we support thoughtful evaluations of how public health systems can improve. We're not afraid of learning from the past. In fact, continuous improvement is an essential component of effective public health.

But LD 389 is not a meaningful or constructive evaluation. It's a political stunt.

While this bill *sounds* like a good idea—after all, who wouldn't want to study our response and be better prepared next time?—the reality is very different. Through my work to support strong immunization laws nationwide, I've seen commissions like this play out in other states, including Arizona, New Hampshire, and Louisiana. They were billed as reviews, but in practice, they became political theater.

In Arizona, the commission was sponsored by anti-vaccine groups like Children's Health Defense. It gave a platform to QAnon conspiracy theorists who claimed COVID vaccines killed half a million Americans and that all vaccines cause autism. There were no credible public health experts, and no honest or productive examination of the response—just hours of misinformation that undermined trust in science and health professionals.

We can't afford that in Maine.

We don't need a taxpayer-funded stage for fringe voices who want to re-litigate the pandemic. We need investment in the systems that actually protect people—like immunization programs, public communication tools, and emergency preparedness.

We already have mechanisms for review. State agencies conduct after-action reports. Independent researchers publish evaluations. And in 2024, the Congressional Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Pandemic concluded its two-year investigation into the COVID-19 pandemic, reviewing over one million documents and producing a 520 page final report.

If the Legislature wants to improve transparency or emergency response, there are better ways than launching a 14-point fishing expedition that's ripe for partisan grandstanding.

Maine should not follow the path other states have taken—because we've seen where it leads: divisiveness, distrust, and policy based on politics rather than public health.

We must move forward. We must focus on solutions. And we must reject LD 389.

Thank you.

Northe Saunders

Portland

Maine Families for Vaccines