

Janet T. Mills  
Governor

Sara Gagné-Holmes  
Commissioner



Maine Department of Health and Human Services  
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
11 State House Station  
286 Water Street  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011  
Tel; (207) 287-8016; Fax (207) 287-2887  
TTY: Dial 711 (Maine Relay)

Testimony of the Maine Center for Disease Control  
Maine Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In opposition to LD 436, *An Act to Prohibit State Agencies from Promoting the COVID-19  
Vaccination to Children*

Sponsor: Representative Eder  
Hearing Date: March 31, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Jessica Shiminski, and I serve as the Program Director of the Maine Immunization Program (MIP) within the Maine Center for Disease Control (Maine CDC) in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to testify in opposition to LD 436, *An Act to Prohibit State Agencies from Promoting the COVID-19 Vaccination to Children*.

LD 436 seeks to prohibit state agencies from promoting the COVID-19 vaccination to children. While the intent of this bill may be to limit government involvement in health decisions, the implications will be far reaching. This bill will create confusion and distrust among parents and guardians, hindering efforts to increase vaccination rates among children. The Maine CDC will need to focus further efforts and resources on combatting vaccine misinformation and managing potential outbreaks. By limiting the availability of information about a healthcare choice that is proven to reduce COVID infection rates, Maine will likely see an increase in preventable COVID-related illnesses and, consequently, the increased need for healthcare services, including MaineCare-funded services.

The Maine CDC strongly opposes LD 436. Vaccine education and promotion are core functions of the Maine Immunization Program (MIP). Reliable, science-based information for vaccines (i.e. RSV, influenza, COVID, Tdap) is disseminated through trusted channels like provider offices, Maine CDC and MaineCare websites, agency media campaigns, and professional networking groups. While children under age 18 require parental consent to receive vaccinations, trusted messaging from MIP and healthcare providers is essential in equipping parents and guardians with accurate information to make informed decisions about their children's health. Without this, misinformation will spread, and vaccination rates will decline, reversing the efforts that the Department has worked diligently to maintain.

This bill does not address a legitimate concern. Instead, it increases vaccine hesitancy and misinformation, posing a significant threat to public health. The State's efforts to increase vaccination rates are crucial in protecting the health of children in Maine and this bill undermines those efforts. LD 436 explicitly prevents MaineCare from promoting the COVID-19

vaccine to children, putting our most vulnerable populations, including MaineCare enrolled children and families, at greater risk of illness. Prohibiting education appears contrary to the fact that MaineCare covers COVID vaccines for eligible children. This move will undoubtedly result in an increase in healthcare costs for families and for the State.

In conclusion, Maine CDC, in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services Office of MaineCare Services, strongly opposes LD 436, as it would interfere with the State's ability to protect children from preventable diseases, limits families' access to credible information important to healthcare decision-making, and for the anticipated unintended consequences to public health, if enacted. Withholding this information, that would only serve to protect children, is denying people access to critical safety regulations that prevent harm. It undermines the public's ability to make informed decisions, fails to prioritize patient safety, and compromises the Department's responsibility to protect the wellbeing of its youngest and most vulnerable residents. We urge the committee to reject this bill to ensure Maine families continue to have access to trusted, science-based information.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have and to make myself available for questions at the work session.