



Testimony in OPPOSITION to LD 871, An Act to Exempt All Persons, Including Health Care and Emergency Services Personnel, from COVID-19 Vaccine Requirements

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
March 31, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Northe Saunders, and I'm a parent and a pro-vaccine advocate. I'm also the Director of Maine Families for Vaccines and the Executive Director of SAFE Communities Coalition, a national organization devoted to promoting strong public health policies.

I am here today to respectfully urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on LD 871. This bill is rooted in misinformation and perpetuates a false narrative around COVID-19 vaccines. Anti-vaccine legislation like this should not advance in the legislature and has no place in Maine. Maine Families for Vaccines has testified in opposition to this legislation in past sessions and will continue to do so every time it's introduced.

This bill would prohibit any requirement—now or in the future—for COVID-19 vaccination, even for healthcare workers and emergency responders. It would undermine the safety of some of our most essential environments: hospitals, nursing homes, EMS services, and long-term care facilities. These are places where our most vulnerable community members seek care and protection. Vaccination is one of the most effective tools we have to keep those environments safe.

An unvaccinated person is significantly more likely to be hospitalized from COVID-19—and the financial cost is substantial. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the average cost of a COVID-19 hospitalization for people with private health insurance in 2020 was over

\$41,000.¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that a single COVID hospitalization requiring ICU care and a ventilator can cost more than \$50,000.²

Those costs impact all of us—through insurance premiums, taxpayer-funded coverage, and workforce disruptions. And that doesn't include the economic burden on families or the ripple effect across the healthcare system when staffing shortages worsen due to illness.

Let's also remember that healthcare workers themselves were among the hardest hit during the pandemic. Maine's doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals showed up for us day after day during a deadly crisis. Requiring COVID-19 vaccination was never about punishment—it was about protection. For our healthcare workers, their patients, and their families.

As the father of three young children, I want to know that if we ever need a hospital or an ambulance, the people caring for us are protected against serious, preventable diseases. That kind of trust and security is not possible if we legislate away the ability to maintain basic public health standards.

This bill would tie the hands of future leaders and public health experts—even in the face of a new COVID variant or another surge. We cannot afford to ban the use of a tool that has saved millions of lives worldwide just because we are no longer in crisis. There are no current

Maine has led the nation in vaccine policy and pandemic response. We are proud of that legacy. I urge you not to abandon it now.

On behalf of the thousands of families, healthcare professionals, and vaccine advocates we represent, I respectfully urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Northe Saunders
Director, Maine Families for Vaccines
Portland

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<https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/cost-of-covid-19-hospital-admissions-among-people-with-private-health-coverage>

2

https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2023/22_0292.htm