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

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In opposition to LD 871, *An Act to Exempt All Persons, Including Health Care and Emergency Services Personnel, from COVID-19 Vaccine Requirements*

Sponsor: Representative Cimino
Hearing Date: March 31, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Dr. Puthiery Va, and I serve as the Director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) in the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to testify in opposition to LD 871, *An Act to Exempt All Persons, Including Health Care and Emergency Services Personnel, from COVID-19 Vaccine Requirements*.

LD 871 seeks to prohibit the State from requiring COVID-19 vaccinations for all individuals, including health care and emergency services personnel. While Maine did require COVID-19 vaccination for healthcare personnel during the pandemic, this requirement was lifted at the beginning of 2024. The intent behind this bill is to ensure that such mandates cannot be reinstated, even in the event of a future pandemic or public health emergency. By restricting the ability of public health officials to implement vaccine requirements, when necessary, LD 871 could compromise public health protections, increase the risk of disease transmission in high-risk settings, and weaken Maine's ability to respond to future health crises.

Maine CDC opposes LD 871 because high vaccination rates among health care workers and emergency services personnel are critical to protecting vulnerable populations, reducing transmission, and maintaining workforce stability. COVID-19 vaccines remain among the most effective tools in preventing severe illness, reducing hospitalizations, and ensuring that Maine's healthcare infrastructure remains functional during outbreaks. Exempting essential personnel from vaccination requirements not only increases the risk of outbreaks in health care settings, but also puts patients, particularly the elderly and immunocompromised individuals, at unnecessary risk.

Several states have debated or opposed similar legislation due to concerns about public health and patient safety. For example:

- Montana enacted a law banning employers, including hospitals, from requiring vaccinations. However, the Montana Hospital Association opposed this decision, warning that it could put patients at risk and create unnecessary strain on healthcare workers.

- Ohio vetoed a measure that would have weakened regulatory oversight on health care workers regarding vaccine policies, stating that these provisions could undermine health safety and professional medical standards.

These examples highlight how similar legislative efforts have faced significant opposition by public health officials and healthcare providers who have seen first-hand the risks associated with vaccine exemptions like this.

The problem that LD 871 seeks to address is not a valid public health concern. Maine CDC is not currently imposing COVID-19 vaccine mandates, and as the pandemic evolved, Maine adjusted its policies and lifted the COVID-19 vaccine mandate to align with federal guidelines.

During the height of the pandemic, Maine required healthcare personnel, including EMS workers, to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to protect vulnerable populations and maintain our healthcare infrastructure and workforce. This mandate was upheld by both the U.S. Supreme Court and the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, supporting the state's legal authority to implement public health protections. In July of 2023, the Department proposed removing the COVID-19 vaccine requirement for healthcare workers, recognizing the changing landscape of the pandemic and federal guidelines.

Despite this, we have seen past legislative efforts come forward to permanently restrict the state's ability to implement future public health protections. For example, LD 867, introduced to the 130th Legislature, which proposed a five-year moratorium on mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations, did not pass, showing that lawmakers see the value in being able to mandate vaccinations in response to future outbreaks.

Maine CDC strongly opposes LD 871. Maine would be limiting our own ability to respond effectively in the event of another pandemic, increasing the risk of outbreaks and jeopardizing the health of vulnerable populations. As the pandemic has shown us, ensuring high vaccination rates among health care workers is essential in preventing workforce shortages and maintaining stability in our health care infrastructure. Maine CDC urges the committee to reject LD 871 to protect the health and safety of Maine residents.

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.