

Testimony in Opposition to LD 174 and LD 727

Submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

April 7, 2025

Chairman Rafferty, Chairwoman Brennan, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Caitlin Gilmet, and I'm the director of Maine Families for Vaccines, a nonpartisan organization that advocates for strong vaccine laws. I'm here today to express my strong opposition to LD 174 and LD 727, two bills that would dangerously weaken Maine's vaccine requirements and put our children and communities at risk.

I know what it's like to learn the hard way that vaccine-preventable diseases are not just theoretical. When my son Thomas was a baby — too young to be vaccinated — he caught chickenpox at his daycare. I didn't understand then that some parents were opting out of routine childhood vaccines. I assumed all of us were playing by the same rules. It never crossed my mind that another family's choice could harm my child.

But it did. Thomas had open sores, a high fever, and he developed pneumonitis in his lungs. Our daycare furloughed staff, and most families weren't able to return for 28 days. The outbreak was scary, expensive, and most of all – preventable.

We can't keep treating these diseases like distant memories. They're still here — and they spread when vaccination rates fall. There are nearly 500 reported cases of measles in Texas, and two children, aged six and eight, have died. These tragedies are preventable—but only if we have the courage to defend public health.

In 2019, Maine lawmakers came together across party lines to strengthen school immunization requirements. And in 2021, 73% of Maine voters chose to keep those protections in place. That's not just strong public support — it reflects the shared belief that our health and our kids' safety matter.

Vaccines are not a partisan issue. As a parent, I see them for what they are — a way to protect the people we love, backed by decades of science and trusted by the doctors and experts we count on every day.

While other states are retreating from evidence-based policy and embracing disinformation, Maine has the chance to lead. We can show the country what it looks like when leaders stand firm in defense of health, science, and the well-being of our children.

Thank you for your time and your service.

Sincerely,
Caitlin Gilmet
Portland