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Testimony of Janis Hogan, BUS, RN, NCSN

In Opposition to LD 174 LD (An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements) and LD 727 (An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools).

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Janis Hogan. I am a nationally certified school nurse and was Maine's School Nurse of the Year in 2018. After a 48 year career as a registered nurse, I am now retired. However, I still care deeply about the health of my community and the citizens of Maine. That is why I am here today, to voice my strong opposition to both LD 174 LD (An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements) and LD 727 (An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools).

School nurses are on the frontline of public health in our schools. Our practice is grounded in health promotion and illness prevention. As school nurses, one of our primary duties is to monitor the vaccination status of students. Promoting immunizations is a vital component to the prevention of communicable diseases.

Prior to our current immunization law, more than 10% of the students in my school were not fully vaccinated, leaving our community well below the level required to provide herd immunity against these diseases. Together, with the Maine Association of School Nurses, we fully supported the current law which eliminated both religious and personal exemptions to improve the vaccination rates.

The 2020 public referendum seeking to overturn the proposed law was upheld by an overwhelming 72% of voters. In 2021, the current vaccine law was finally implemented and student vaccination rates improved. In the most recent 2024 state immunization report, 95% of students are now fully vaccinated - one of the rates highest in the country.

Thanks to vaccines, many of the forgotten childhood diseases that were once common and feared, are preventable. However, with falling vaccination rates we are in the midst of a measles outbreak in 20 states and tragically, a second child has died this past week. *"For a child who is not vaccinated against measles - one of the world's most infectious viruses - no classroom, school bus or grocery store is safe. Nine out of 10 unvaccinated people exposed to an infected person will catch it, and once measles takes root, the virus can damage the lungs, kidneys and the brain. (How Measles Attacks an Unvaccinated Child, NYT 4.4.2025).* These are not scare tactics, these are the facts. For the health of our children and our state, we must not go backward on school vaccination requirements.

For these reasons, I strongly oppose LD 174 and LD 727.