

## **Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH**

### **In Opposition to LD's 174 & 727**

#### **Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, May 6, 2021**

Good day, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Lani Graham. I am member of the Public Health Committee (PHC) of the Maine Medical Association (MMA) and of the Maine Public Health Association. I am a former Chief Public health Officer for Maine. I live in Freeport.

The two bills you will be hearing this are dangerous for Maine children and for public health. It is ironic and very sad that on this first day of National Public Health week, you are considering two bills that could seriously undermine children's health in Maine. Vaccines are rated number one of all public health achievements.

A major landmark study published by The Lancet in 2024 revealed that global immunization efforts have saved an estimated 154 million lives – or the equivalent of 6 lives every minute of every year – over the past 50 years. Of the vaccines included in the study, the measles vaccination had the most significant impact on reducing infant mortality, accounting for 60% of the lives saved due to immunization.<sup>1</sup>

In the United States, the first requirement for vaccination of children attending public schools was issued in Massachusetts in 1853. (Duffy, 1978) By the end of the 1800s, most of the states in New England had vaccine requirements for children attending public schools. Doctors, scientists and most parents realized the value of vaccines in protecting the health of children and vaccines were quickly added to requirements as they became available. Ultimately due hard work across all sectors of our country, the elimination of smallpox became a reality, and the elimination measles was on the horizon. But now due to vaccine hesitancy, and unsubstantiated theories about possible vaccine harms, we no longer have that hope. Instead, we are seeing a measles outbreak across our country.

As you consider these two bills the nation is the grip of a measles epidemic. As of April 3, 2025, a total of 607 confirmed measles cases were reported by 22 states, including Rhode Island and Vermont.<sup>2</sup> And there has already been one confirmed death in a child arising from this pandemic.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/news/item/24-04-2024-global-immunization-efforts-have-saved-at-least-154-million-lives-over-the-past-50-years#:~:text=%22Vaccines%20are%20among%20the%20most,vaccines%20during%20the%20pandemic%20years.>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/index.html>

But with your help, Maine children and families have a chance to avert this tragedy. Vaccination rates across the country have declined from 95% to approximately 93%, a rate below herd immunity.<sup>3</sup> But the rates in Maine have increased steadily since 2019, when the state passed legislation ending nonmedical exemptions reaching 97% in the school year 2022-23.<sup>4</sup>

LD 174 is a clear attempt to circumvent the expressed will of Maine people who supported our current law without a religious exemption. This law if passed would take us right back to the place we had reached when religious and philosophical exemptions were eliminated due to falling immunization rates and resultant outbreaks. Maine children would be vulnerable to measles and to death.

LD 727 is even worse as it rolls back entirely vaccine requirements.

Please vote ought not to pass on these two bills. Thank you for your attention. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/73/wr/mm7341a3.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <https://themaine-monitor.org/childhood-vaccination-rates/#:~:text=During%20the%20last%20school%20year,passed%20legislation%20ending%20nonmedical%20exemptions.>