

Testimony in OPPOSITION to LD 174 and LD 727

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Apr 7, 2025

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

My name is Rebecca Bell, and I am an RN and school nurse currently practicing in the Portland Public Schools district.

I am in opposition to both LD 174 (An Act to Restore Religious Exemptions to Immunization Requirements) and LD 727 (An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools).

As a school nurse for the past 15 years, and as a Community Health nurse in the Bangor area for 9 years previously, I have been involved in both the administration of public health measures, including preventive education for communicable diseases, administration of vaccines in the community, as well as the tracking of compliance data for students in public schools.

Prior to our current immunization law, in 2019 rates of nonmedical exemptions were at 6.2%. Currently, they are at .9%. This translates to more children being protected, and schools are safer from outbreaks.

Prior to the law being changed in 2021 by public referendum, 10% of students were not fully vaccinated. In 2024, the vaccination rate of Maine school children was 95% - one of the highest in the country.

Removing vaccine requirements is dangerous - to children, educators, healthcare workers, and families of those unvaccinated - especially the elderly or those who are immunocompromised.

In our country currently, we have a measles outbreak in ⁵~~20~~ states. In these states, exemption rates are high and vaccination laws are weak. Measles is a highly preventable disease as long as there are enough persons

The US has more measles cases this year than all of 2024.

and the rates are low

vaccinated to keep it at bay. That is otherwise known as herd immunity. Measles and other vaccine-preventative diseases can not only be fatal, but can cause lifelong health problems.

Taking a step backwards in public and community health mandates serves in no one's best interest.

I thereby oppose LD 174 and LD 727 and respectfully urge you to vote "Ought Not to Pass" on these bills.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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