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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 Education and Cultural Affairs

In opposition to LD 727, *An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools*

Sponsor: Representative Quint
Hearing Date: April 7, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan-Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, 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 727, *An Act to Repeal Certain Immunization Requirements for Schools*.

LD 727 seeks to repeal sections of Maine's Immunization laws, removing all statutory authority to require vaccinations for school and childcare attendance. If enacted, Maine will become the only state in the country without school immunization requirements, making the State an outlier and significantly increasing the risk of vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks.

The elimination of these requirements not only threatens the health of students but also increases the likelihood of school and community-wide outbreaks, disrupting education and creating unnecessary burden on our healthcare system and financial burden on the state. School nurses, childcare providers and healthcare workers will face increased challenges in containing and managing these outbreaks, which, as experienced during the pandemic, leads to provider burnout and increased turnover.

School immunization laws are in place as a safeguard for individuals and entire communities against the spread of highly contagious diseases such as measles, pertussis, and chickenpox. Disease outbreaks become more frequent in states with fewer requirements. For example, Texas, which has one of the most lenient vaccine exemption policies, has reported 159 cases of measles as of March 4, 2025. Texas also announced the first measles-related death in this outbreak – a heartbreaking yet entirely preventable tragedy. Measles deaths are rare in highly vaccinated populations, meaning this outcome was avoidable.

These cases typically occur in communities with weakened immunization laws, where refusals to vaccinate are increasing due to both misinformation and religious and philosophical beliefs. Additionally, more families are opting to homeschool to avoid having to comply with school immunization requirements. LD 727 puts vulnerable populations, including children and immuno-compromised individuals, at increased and needless risk.

In addition to Texas, 20 other states have reported ongoing outbreaks since 2024, reinforcing the fact that weaker immunization laws result in the increased spread of disease. Maine has reported zero measles cases since 2019, a direct result of having successfully maintained strong immunization laws. Repealing these requirements undermines the efforts that have kept Maine schools and communities safe. Maine voters have already upheld the removal of non-medical exemptions through referendum (PL 2019 c. 154). The decision to remove these protections by enacting LD 727 would be disregarding the public's support for maintaining immunization laws. This decision would be irresponsible and would place our children and families at unnecessary risk.

There is also a financial burden for the State. The financial burden of managing vaccine-preventable outbreaks related to healthcare costs and public health interventions, has been shown to be substantial on states and to the publics.

- In 2017, Minnesota's measles outbreak affected 79 individuals and cost the state \$2.3 million in just five months. The outbreak affected unvaccinated children, requiring public health intervention, including emergency staffing, vaccination and medical care.
- In 2019, Clark County, Washington experienced a measles outbreak that resulted in 72 confirmed cases, incurring \$3.4 million in total costs, averaging \$47,479 per case. Of this, \$2.3 million was spent on public health response to the outbreak, including disease containment, medical expenses, and productivity losses due to illness and quarantine.

If an outbreak similar to those in Minnesota and Washington occurred in Maine, it would likely incur significant costs to the State. Increased outbreaks anticipated with the removal of vaccine requirements as proposed in LD 727 will exceed Maine CDC capacity and require additional resources for effective disease surveillance, control, and response as the Public Health authority. At a minimum, Maine CDC will require:

- 2 FTE Public Health Educator III positions
- 2 FTE Epidemiologists

In addition to staffing needs, outbreak response costs include hospitalizations, treatments and public health interventions. School closures, absenteeism, and increased time off from work for parents as they stay home to care for their sick children all increase.

If enacted, the repeal of Maine's immunization laws will increase the likelihood of outbreaks, place unnecessary strain on our healthcare system and cost the state millions of dollars in unnecessary public health costs. For these reasons, Maine CDC urges the committee to oppose LD 727 and protect Maine's children, families and economy by maintaining the immunization requirements keeping our communities safer.

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.