

Toni Bashinsky
Topsham
LD 51

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Committee of Education and Cultural Affairs.

My name is Toni Bashinsky. I am a lifelong Mainer, a Topsham resident and homeowner, a graduate of The University of Maine, as well as a wife and mother to three amazing children ages 9, 4, and 3 months. I am writing this testimony in support of LD 51, LD 869, LD 1098, LD 1148, LD 1209, and LD 1228.

As I write this, I recall the efforts made to reject LD 798, a bill that has forever changed the course of my family's life. I recall the extreme emotional and mental toll it took on my family and so many others. That bill forever changed our lives.

When my first child was born 9 years ago, never in my life did I think we would have to face such extreme circumstances and make incredibly difficult choices in order to protect our beliefs. Since the passage of LD798, I have left the work force to become a stay at home mother and a homeschooler - both are things I never imagined were in my future. Some would argue, 'that's what you do for family, you sacrifice', and although that is true, I can't help but feel that even though it's been 3 years, this sacrifice is extremely atypical, targeted, and frankly, quite punitive.

I never thought that our choice not to vaccinate would result in our children not being able to attend school in Maine. Schools we help fund with property taxes from our now single income household. To actually be discriminated against because of this choice still baffles me to this day. For our children to be barred from their right to public education that is their Constitutional right to obtain.

I am well aware that families like ours are often looked down on because of our choices. We are viewed as dangerous or reckless or careless. All things I know for fact we are not. The decision not to vaccinate was not made on a whim and did not come lightly. In fact, it's a decision we often revisit as parents and reflect on to ensure that it still is the right decision for our family. It was not one made overnight. But one that occurred due to countless hours of research and speaking with many different doctors. There are three people in our lives that I could never be reckless with and that's our children.

To be ostracized and discriminated against in a time when everywhere you look from school curricula, to television and movies, the message is love and acceptance and inclusivity, and then to have to explain to our children that they cannot attend the school located right in our neighborhood is painful and contradictory.

We do what we can to bring the message of love and acceptance to our children despite the government in Maine so blatantly casting us aside. This is why I must let my thoughts be known today and why I show such great support of LD 51, LD 869, LD 1098, LD 1148, LD 1209, and LD 1228.

Bring exemptions back.

Thank you for your time.

Toni Bashinsky