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TO: Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

FROM: Mikenzie Dwyer, Public Health & Government Affairs Associate

DATE: April 3, 2023

OPPOSE – [LD 51](#); An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and the members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Mikenzie Dwyer, I am the Public Health and Government Affairs Associate for the Maine Medical Association and I live in Windham. The Maine Medical Association appreciates the opportunity to submit the following comments in strong opposition to LD 51 which would reinstate religious and philosophical exemptions to immunization requirements that was repealed in 2021 to protect against preventable diseases in the wake of the pandemic.

The Maine Medical Association is Maine's largest professional association representing over 4,300 current and future physicians from all specialties in all practice settings.

"The impact of vaccination on the health of the world's peoples is hard to exaggerate. With the exception of safe water, no other modality has had such a major effect on mortality reduction and population growth" ([Plotkin and Mortimer, 1988](#)).

Vaccination has made an enormous contribution to public health. Often it is stated that vaccination has made the greatest contribution to global health of any human intervention apart from clean water and sanitation. The intentions of this bill may come from a good place; but in seeking a balance between religious freedom and public health we must consider which possesses the greatest risk. The MMA's top priorities include protecting and investing in our public health to ensure the safety of all Maine residents now and in the future. Vaccinations are an effective, safe, and efficient way to protect public health – of importance the pandemic has clearly demonstrated for us these past few years.

In 2021, Maine repealed immunization requirements to remove religious and philosophical exemptions. This repeal, which required all children to have their immunization for school entry unless they had a medical exemption, was supported by 72% of [Maine voters](#) in a March 2020 referendum.

The Maine Medical Association is a statewide volunteer organization formed in 1853, serving more than 4,300 current and future Maine physicians in all clinical specialties, organizations, and practice settings.

Immunization is the only way we can completely stop the transmission of communicable diseases and potentially eradicate them. However, immunization works best if everyone able has it – creating [herd-immunity](#) to protect those with significant medical reasons preventing them from receiving the vaccine.

Vaccine hesitancy is a significant public health issue we must work to address. It is understandable to want background research of the efficacy and evidence behind what we give our children. But vaccines are well researched, evidence-based, safe, and effective. We are already seeing [news reports](#) of eradicated diseases such as measles spreading among school children because of vaccine hesitancy and refusal. This is putting children's lives at risk.

For these reasons we also oppose the following bills before the committee today: LD 869, 1098, 1148, 1209, and 1228. With regards to LDs 1148 and 1228 as they impact colleges and universities this could pose an additional public health risk due to the close nature of dorms. [LD 830](#) seeks to study providing on-campus housing for all students in response to the increased enrollment in community colleges. It is important to consider how to protect these students as we increase on-campus dorm opportunities.

We thank the committee for hearing our comments and welcome any questions.

Sincerely,
Mikenzie Dwyer
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