

Carolyn Falank
Farmingdale
LD 51

Dear members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, all State legislators and citizens of Maine,

My name is Dr. Carolyn Falank, PhD. I am a proud home educating parent, UMaine graduate and clinical scientist working in healthcare. I am in support of LD 51, LD 869, LD 1098, LD 1148, LD 1209, and LD 1223. I have two subject areas that I would like to touch upon. The first one is that I watched as the State of Maine violated the First Amendment and forced frontline healthcare workers to choose between their careers and their religious or philosophical beliefs. Remote healthcare workers were fired because they were a threat to patients and fellow coworkers despite their job location (at home). And let's not forget that we all watched as St. Mary's allowed COVID positive employees to continue caring for patients, despite the lack of evidence-based studies showing that the vaccines stopped transmission of the SARS-CoV2 virus. We all witnessed Central Maine Healthcare close their NICU over staffing resignations due to the vaccine mandates which put an even harder strain on their declining employee retention rate. News headlines of numerous long term care facilities (up to 85% of them), nursing homes and group homes facing staffing crisis closing left and right. Was this truly necessary? Was this to keep patients and members of our communities "safe"? Because according to the Maine CDC they reported between 2/6/23 and 2/13/23 on their COVID19 breakthrough data that 35 out of the 40 COVID19 related deaths were in fully vaccinated individuals, which came at the same time of 54 consecutive data updates where the fully vaccinated made up the majority of hospitalizations (dating back to 3/4/2022). I think it is finally time to follow the science and build policy and laws upon evidence-based data.

In addition, where has the state's constitutional responsibility to protect religious exercise, private or public been? Why is the State of Maine allowing LD798 to continue as state law even though it is preempted by federal law....and where is the equity for people that uphold personal religious beliefs? The separation of church and state is all about equity- it is to ensure that all people, regardless if they practice a specific religion or not, be treated the same.

This brings me to my second subject: Equity. In addition to healthcare workers.... What about our children? The Maine DOE defines equity as "providing each student a legitimate opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive in school and beyond". But what about those children who aren't allowed to attend school because the State discriminates against them due to their religious or philosophical beliefs? What are we teaching our children, our future leaders, about inclusion and equity? What we are currently teaching them is that certain Maine children, based on their religious beliefs, aren't allowed to attend school. That they are different and that they are punished for upholding religious convictions and are not entitled to the same public education because of it. Please consider being in favor of LD51, allow all of Maine's children equal opportunities to learn.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Carolyn Falank, MS, PhD