

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Kalie Hess and I'm here to testify in opposition to L.D. 51, An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements, and the other immunization bills under consideration.

I am a public health professional with more than a decade of experience in public health, including in vaccine advocacy and disinformation. I am also a mom to young children in childcare. As someone who helped with the passage of the law that L.D. 51 would undo, I would have liked to be there in person to testify today. However, my family had a total of 12 days with childcare in the month of March due to illnesses that originated from childcare, so I appreciate the chance to submit testimony in this way.

At the hearing for the law that this bill would repeal, we had hours and hours of testimony on this issue, filled with vaccine mis- and disinformation from those opposed to vaccinations, and evidence-based information presented to you from reputable individuals such as pediatricians and organizations that have steadfastly promoted public health. You'll hear more of the same today. I'd remind you that those opposed to vaccination are a vocal minority as the majority of Mainers support vaccination and, in fact, voted via referendum to maintain Maine's strong vaccine laws when faced with the opportunity to do so.

I'd urge you to listen to the reputable experts and consider the negative impact repealing Maine's vaccine requirements would have on families like mine, who are already struggling due to the burden of illnesses we face nearly weekly with children in childcare. Consider the impacts on children who are immunocompromised or undergoing cancer treatment. Consider the childcare workers and teachers who deserve to work in a safe workplace. Consider their grandparents who can't see their grandchildren because the children are already constantly sick from childcare illnesses. Adding in managing the impacts of outbreaks of illnesses for which there are perfectly good and safe vaccines is a ludicrous and unfair burden to place on families and children.

Please vote no on these bills and respect science and the will of Maine people.

Thank you.