

Kurt Knudsen  
Topsham  
LD 51

Dear Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, all State Legislators (present and absent), and fellow citizens of the State of Maine,

My name is Kurt Knudsen, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to write to you today in regard to restoring the religious and philosophical exemptions that were eliminated with the passage of LD 798 back in 2019. I am a former healthcare worker that was a casualty of the Governor's COVID vaccine mandate, but that is not why I am giving this testimony. I fought my personal battle, and though I am no longer employed in the healthcare sector, I am proud to say I fought for what I believe in, and no job or career is worth forfeiting my God given liberties. Today, I am fighting for my children and for their right to equal education opportunities in alignment with what I believe is right for them as a parent, and not as prescribed by the State. I am speaking to you all in supporting LD 51 and righting an egregious wrong.

Let me begin with this:

First Amendment

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech..."

Article 1: Declaration of Rights. Section 3

"All individuals have a natural and unalienable right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences, and no person shall be hurt, molested or restrained in that person's liberty or estate for worshipping God in the manner and season most agreeable to the dictates of that person's own conscience, nor for that person's religious professions or sentiments".

What I have just cited are the Religious Liberty Clauses of The United States and Maine State Constitutions. The passage of LD 798 and its prohibition of religious and philosophical exemptions for vaccinations clearly violates the civil liberties etched in our guiding documents.

Chief Justice John Marshall declared in the 1803 case of Marbury v. Madison that "A Law repugnant to the Constitution is void."

Article IV Part 3rd Section 1 of the Maine State Constitution corroborates the previous statement:

"The Legislature, with the exceptions hereinafter stated, shall have full power to make and establish all reasonable laws and regulations for the defense and benefit of the people of this State, not repugnant to this Constitution, nor to that of the United States."

LD 798 is certainly repugnant to our state and national constitutions.

Article X Section 3 of the Maine State Constitution says the following:

"All laws now in force in this State, and not repugnant to this Constitution, shall remain, and be in force, until altered or repealed by the Legislature, or shall expire by their own limitation."

Having said all this, I want to draw attention to our elected officials. Given the evidence presented, it is abundantly clear that you have a constitutional duty to now repeal LD 798 and reinstate religious and philosophical exemptions with the passage of LD 51.

That constitutional duty was accepted by you when you were sworn in to your position. I give you Article IX Section 1 of the Maine State Constitution: The Oath of Office:

"Every person elected or appointed to either of the places or offices provided in this Constitution, and every person elected, appointed, or commissioned to any judicial, executive, military or other office under this State, shall, before entering on the discharge of the duties of that place or office, take and subscribe the following oath or affirmation:

"I, \_\_\_\_\_ do swear, that I will support the Constitution of the United States and of this State, so long as I shall continue a citizen thereof. So help me God."

"I \_\_\_\_\_ do swear, that I will faithfully discharge, to the best of my abilities, the duties incumbent on me as \_\_\_\_\_ according to the Constitution and laws of the State. So

help me God."

I must say, I find it quite contradictory for any elected representative to favor denying religious and philosophical exemptions, while at the same time swearing before Our Creator to protect them.

Per our National and State Constitutions, LD 798 should have never become law in the first place. It was unconstitutional from its inception, and should never have been presented to the public to vote upon; nor signed into law by our duly elected representatives. But this law isn't entirely on the shoulders of our elected officials. The general public has a responsibility to understand how our government operates, and we need to fully understand the repercussions of our ignorance before we cast our vote. The era of the "low information voter" needs to come to an end. We need to demand transparency and understanding with any bill that is presented to us, which I believe was a huge part in why LD 798 was passed in the first place.

To quote Thomas Jefferson "The best defense of democracy is an informed electorate." This is the gold standard of how We The People preserve our rights, and how we hold our elected officials accountable for retaining said rights.

We ALL need to take and accept responsibility for the outcome of LD 798, and now we must all come together to pass LD 51 and restore our constitutional rights.

Should our elected officials decide to not pass LD 51, I think at least an amendment should be passed to recognize people like myself and others to claim some sort of tax exempt status. Why should we be legally obligated to fund an educational system that is openly discriminating and barring our children from participating in in the first place? It's only fair.

And should they not pass LD 51, let me address my peers, and those within this system of governance that are battling their consciences in executing LD 798 with the following quotes.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr: "One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws".

And Benjamin Franklin: "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God".

Bottom line: The school's job is to educate my children. It is my right to decide what is best for their health and well-being; the same right as every adult that sends their children to school. Regardless of vaccination status, one party cannot be excluded over the other; it surprises me that this topic isn't first and foremost with meetings regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion...

The intellectual cost of LD 798 far outweighs the benefits. Let's reinvest in our children's futures and strengthen our communities again. Please pass LD 51, and let the children get the education they deserve.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Kurt Knudsen