

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the committee, I am asking you today to vote "**ought to pass**" on LD 51.

Due to the detrimental effects that LD 798 has had on my family, I sincerely hope that your committee will restore the rights of our students and healthcare workers to utilize the religious and philosophical exemptions that were in place prior to 2019. The many consequences of LD 798 have left a profound mental impact on me, as it has been one of the greatest stressors and obstacles that I have had to navigate as both a parent, a patient. My family still has a lot to lose without the assurances that our religious obligations to our bodies will be once again safeguarded and we might be able to move forward without the constant threat to our ability to pursue goals, enjoy educational experiences, and make decisions that are based in context rather than forced by an inability to comply.

If LD 51 doesn't pass, my son may be unable to remain a student at the University of Maine in Orono. Not only would this devastate him academically and hinder future opportunities, but his exceptionally promising career as a top division 1 track and field athlete would be shattered. It's a bit nightmarish to think of him having to choose between his faith and fulfilling a dream that he has already worked so hard for the great achievements he has earned thus far. It would be equally devastating to see him lose the opportunity to finish pursuing the high-standard goals he is so committed to.

Since 2019, I had to take my elementary age child out of public school, and homeschool her, despite having a chronic illness which has burdened us financially and exhausted myself physically these last several years. Although homeschooling has turned out to be a lovely blessing, we are still impacted by the limitations set in 2019. If LD 51 does not pass, she will continue to be deprived of the opportunity to participate in the classes from her old school that she had previously enjoyed such as art and gym. She has missed out on many opportunities, as LD 798 had far-reaching consequences that infiltrated both public education and homeschooling communities alike.

The last point I would like to make is in regard to how LD 51 needs to pass in order for patients such as myself to receive proper and effective medical care. Since 2019, I have not been able to secure a doctor who is allowed to be sympathetic to my environmental illness. With an immune system that could never tolerate vaccination, I have been forced to seek medical care in a system that no longer employs professionals who understand my illness deeply enough to empathize or set adequate treatment goals. The shortage has made doctors hard to come by, and the ones who are left are simply not allowed to advise a patient like me on how to overcome an illness that has made my system unable to process even the slightest of environmental toxins, let alone a vaccine.

I urge you to hear the pleas of families and medical professionals today. I ask that you hear the vast reaching consequences of LD 798 that has plagued many of us since 2019. Passing LD 51 will finally offer relief to the mental anguish sustained while my family has been forced to protect our religious faith with great consequences to our medical well-being and parenting options. The education of my children and their ability to pursue the future they deserve weighs heavily on our religious rights and our freedom to choose what we put in our bodies.

Thank you so much for your consideration and attention to this matter.

