

## Testimony in favor of LD51, An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements

April 3, 2023 Public Hearing

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Verna O'Neil, a 15 year resident of the town of Phillips, until October 2021. My family and I are an example of the tragic loss that has occurred and is occurring in Maine, as a result of the removal of religious and philosophical vaccine exemptions.

After 30 years in the field, and over 20 years serving his rural community as a much-needed paramedic, my husband Jeremy was fired from his job for not taking the covid vaccine, even though he provided his employer with documented natural immunity. He was refused a religious exemption, though for many years previously he had been granted one for other vaccines. This was a terrible loss to us as he was barred from any job in the state of Maine.

We lost our home in Maine. We lost health insurance in the middle of my pregnancy. We lost our community of family and friends. Phillips lost two firefighters, my husband and my eldest son.

My eldest daughter, Deirdre, served as a CNA at a nursing home in Maine, working right through a covid outbreak there. She was terminated as well for refusal to vaccinate. What a loss to the community during a healthcare crisis! Deirdre had planned to study to be a midwife in Maine. She is now in her second year in a midwifery program in Texas. What a loss to Maine.

University of Maine lost an engineering student in my son, Jackson, who planned to attend UMO. He is now an honors engineering student at Liberty University in Virginia.

I have seven other bright children who have no future in Maine because the religious and healthcare freedom we had before was taken away. There are no educational opportunities for them.

I know there are many other families that have suffered even worse than ours, and Maine has suffered greatly as a state from the loss of dedicated healthcare providers and students who would have been the future. Please vote in favor of LD 51 and put Maine back on track to gain and not lose!