

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Committee of Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Meg Osgood. I am a lifelong Mainer, a Portland homeowner and a homeschooling mother of four amazing children. I am here to testify in support of LD 51, LD 869, LD 1098, LD 1148, LD 1209, and LD 1228.

In most schools today, inclusivity is a strong and important theme. Our children are being taught, from a young age, to embrace diversity and create safe spaces for marginalized people. They are encouraged to respect differences in race, religion, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Diversity is seen as a strength, something to celebrate.

This is especially important and meaningful for my family, as we are a blended family with unique heritage. My two sons are the descendants of strong Armenian ancestors who, above all odds, survived genocide and the struggles of immigration, only to have their great-great grandsons denied their freedom of education in America over a century later.

My two daughters are people of color. They have learned a lot about race disparity in the last few years, but their father and I are teaching them to be proud of who they are, and most importantly, that they are entitled to the same freedoms as every other American. In Maine, they do not have the freedom of every other American.

When my daughter asked if she couldn't go to school because of the color of her skin, I told her no, that is not why. However, when we consider the fact that BIPOC communities have lower vaccination rates when compared to predominantly white communities, these vaccine mandates *do* seem to have roots in racist and ableist lawmaking.

Why are we allowing our children to receive these mixed messages? Why is it okay for some children to be different and unique in their expression of gender or sexuality, but it's not okay for a child to say no to a single dose of any vaccine if they want the same rights as their peers?

Families who choose to selectively vaccinate, or not vaccinate at all, often have legitimate philosophical reasons, or religious convictions, and make these decisions after a period of significant education and discussion with their trusted family healthcare practitioners. These families are just as valid as any other family, and justly deserve the same freedoms that other families enjoy.

Today is my son's eleventh birthday. He is here with me today, though he did not feel comfortable getting up to speak. Freedom is something that is very important to him and he would like the freedom to attend public school. He wants to make more friends, he says. More than anything, he wants the chance to ride a school bus and hear the latest "gossip." I want him, and my other children, to grow up with the same opportunities that most Maine kids have access to. It is our right, as free and taxpaying Americans, to give our children equal opportunities to learn and grow as human beings.

Thank you for your time and consideration.  
Meg Osgood