

To: Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
From: Lisa Packard
Re: Support of LD 51
Date: April 3, 2023

Dear Senator Joseph Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

I am writing in support of LD 51 An Act to Restore Religious and Philosophical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements.

I support LD 51 for the financial support and stability this bill offers our schools. Following the passing of LD 798 and COVID, Maine suffered from a wave of students leaving public schools, resulting in financial hardship for districts. Maine's schools cannot afford to lose any more students at this time. We cannot afford to lose students who are healthy and high performing simply because they are missing a vaccine.

LD 51 provides stability and consistency for our students. The pandemic has been a severe disruption to children's education. Must we further disrupt learning? Is it fair for students who have attended school for a decade or more under previous exemption laws to now be denied a high school diploma or a college degree? LD 51 provides educational continuity for all.

School vaccination rates are the highest they have ever been, steadily above 95%. For the years leading up to the passing of LD 798, Maine school vaccination rates were higher than the national average. LD 51 acknowledges Maine's success at vaccination rates, and allows free and appropriate education for ALL students. There is no single documented case of an immunocompromised child contracting a vaccine-targeted disease in the state of Maine. With such low risk in our state, why would we reject healthy, bright students from our school system?

When Maine became a state 200 years ago, we adopted the motto *Dirigo* - "I direct, I guide." Our education system encourages students to be forward thinking, to be leaders. Leadership requires diversity. LD 51 allows for diversity of religious and philosophical beliefs in our school system. By voting "Ought to pass," you uphold our state's promise to provide an education for ALL students, free of discrimination. LD 51 honors fairness; it honor the decision parents made when they first enrolled their child in school under Maine law that allowed exemptions.

I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass."

Respectfully,
Lisa Packard

Lisa Packard
Unity, Maine
LD 51

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