

TESTIMONY 4/3/2023

To the Esteemed Members of the Committee of Education and Cultural Affairs,

I want to thank you for your service to the people of Maine. Expressly, I thank you for your ear today as you are faced with protecting the rights of the citizens in your communities. I am a mother, an educator, a registered nurse, and a lifelong Mainer.

The last time I came before the state house was to speak in opposition to LD 798. At that time I was concerned that the freedoms my patients and my family had benefited from would be removed.

While I believe deeply in the potential of Western Medicine. Like most Americans, I also maintain personal responsibility is imperative to a healthy body. Denying that religious and philosophical ideas have a place when discussing public health is antagonistic to the most basic tenet of Western Medicine "First, do no harm". Denying religious and philosophical exemptions to any medical intervention is antagonistic to the most important maxim of medical ethics, "informed consent". LD 798 did harm. LD 798 took away informed consent. How little we knew when it passed that we were on the brink of a dramatically different world. In this new world LD 798 took away choice for Maine students and families. Mainers in the fight knew that was coming, what Mainers were not prepared for was for medical professionals to also lose their rights to exemptions and not just religious and philosophical exemptions. Many students in the public and private schools lost their medical exemptions I beg the committee to consider that reality. Many health care workers lost their medical exemptions, almost all lost their religious and philosophical. The climate of the Covid 19 Pandemic, abetted by the new law LD 798 put fear above judgment and medical reasoning. LD 798 is actually a clear indictment of the very reason we must keep philosophical and religious exemptions in place. Physicians became fearful they would lose their license if they gave exemptions. That is not hyperbole, ask a healthcare worker you know. LD 798 has not stopped vaccine hesitancy, but it has turbo boosted conspiracy thinking. It has led Maine families to drop out of the system. Thousands of healthcare workers lost their right to their livelihood. Thousands more made

a medical decision not of informed consent but out of pure coercion sowing anger and frustration at the very medical establishment they work within. It is the current prevailing medical paradigm that the safety of vaccines is unquestionable. That world view presumes the safety profile of most vaccines far outweighs individual risk and thus the socially responsible thing to do is to mandate what is best for society. However, that prevailing paradigm does not adjust to any facts that are contrary to the rigid view. Dissent is not allowed. It is a puritanical world view that does not consider diverse opinions and has in fact tried to silence opposing views at every corner to stop debate. The authorities actively aim to deny individuals of their healthcare experience and gaslight people who have been injured or have deeply held religious or medical beliefs that believe this intervention may be unhealthy for their body. Before LD 798 there were rules in place, rules that pertain to both vaccinated and unvaccinated students who become infected with communicable disease. Those rules did not disappear under LD 798 and are not undermined by LD 51.

LD 51 has the potential to reverse the erosion LD 798 created. When LD 798 passed it was among the strictest of laws in the country. Despite its narrow passing at the time I firmly believe if it was brought to the voters today it would be handily defeated. Voting to support LD 51 is a good faith act that can restore some sense of harmony among political parties and begin to rebuild trust in a failing healthcare system. More importantly, it protects body autonomy. It also restores informed consent. The horrendous outcomes for families, children, and healthcare workers is hard to deny. LD 798 has not protected our communities the way it was promised but rather, alienated and divided Mainers.

I ask you to surprise yourself and vote “ought to pass” on LD 51, keep the mandates if you must, but restore religious exemptions, philosophical exemptions, and real medical choice.

“Medicine practiced well is beautiful. As a human pursuit it is pure.....conversely, medicine done poorly is painful to watch and worse to experience”.

Vinay Prasad MD, MP

(Footnote) Vinay Prasad MD, MPH “Ending Medical Reversal Improving Outcomes, Saving Lives” Vinay Prasad, MD, MPH, Adam Cifu, MD @2015,

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