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LD 51

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Educational & Cultural Affairs Committee, this is testimony AGAINST LD 51.

Religious freedom is an essential right, but it is not a license to inflict harm on others. As the Supreme Court explained more than 75 years ago in *Prince v. Massachusetts*: “The right to practice religion freely does not include liberty to expose the community or the child to communicable disease or the latter to ill health or death.” Even a sincere request for a religious exemption should be denied if it puts the lives of others at risk.

LD 51 directly endangers the public health and makes more deaths from disease inevitable. It tramples the rights of the most vulnerable, who should be able to participate in society without putting their health at grave risk.

In addition to these risks, government has no realistic way to measure the sincerity of a claimed religious belief justifying an exemption from a rule which preserves public health. We don’t have to try to gauge sincerity if we simply recognize the obvious fact that religious freedom has limits. “Sincerity” does not justify putting others at risk.

There is no blanket constitutional right to religious exemptions from public-health measures that apply to everyone. That includes religious exemptions from vaccination requirements, given the danger unvaccinated people pose to public health.

LD 51 attacks public health measures by allowing vaccines to be avoided due to religious exemptions. Vaccines help to prevent the deaths of vulnerable populations, but only so long as people get vaccinated. By allowing religious exemptions to vaccines, diseases are able to evolve to become deadlier, or to avoid existing vaccines.

Please protect public health, and don’t let this bill pass. Thank you.