

## Maine Legislature HHS Committee Statement Regarding LD 867

I am submitting this personal statement regarding LD 867 for the benefit of members of the Health and Human Services Committee, in order to help the Committee make a rational decision regarding the 5 year ban on mandatory COVID-19 vaccination proposed in the legislation.

I am a retired physician currently under treatment for Multiple Myeloma, a cancer of the bone marrow and immune system. I have been a member of the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network since 2013, when I was diagnosed with cancer. I fully endorse the statement submitted by Hilary Schneider, Regional Government Relations Director for ACS/CAN.

Since my cancer treatment has not adequately controlled the disease, my oncologists recently recommended adding a powerful steroid, dexamethasone, to my regimen. Fortunately, I still have been able to produce antibodies to the spike protein of the COVID-19 virus, and recently recovered from a mild COVID infection. I am sure many cancer patients in the State of Maine are similarly immunosuppressed and have grave concerns about their ability to fight off a COVID-19 infection. It's imperative that as many people as possible who are in contact with cancer patients have strong immunity to the virus so they cannot pass on an infection to the vulnerable cancer patients.

A recent study published in *Nature/Blood Cancer* found that the survival of newly diagnosed Myeloma patients decreased in 2020 during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic compared to 2019. The authors also found a doubling of the risk of becoming infected with the coronavirus, and 9% excess mortality over this period. They concluded: "This study highlights the necessity of extending preventive measures worldwide to protect vulnerable patients from SARS CoV-2 infection by promoting social distancing and intensive vaccination strategies."

This is why I support mandatory vaccine requirements for healthcare workers. Vaccination protects patients, other healthcare workers, and likely reduces healthcare staff shortages due to COVID-19 infection or exposure.

What about the downsides of vaccination? Immediate allergic reactions to the vaccination seem to be exceedingly rare; I saw no serious reactions when working at several vaccination clinics and monitoring hundreds of recipients.

Longer term hyperimmune reactions to the vaccine are also fortunately rare. The myocarditis syndrome seen rarely in young men and boys seems to be mild. Thrombotic reactions have been seen mainly with the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. This “Vaccine Induced Thrombotic Thrombocytopenia Syndrome”, or VITTS, occurs mainly in younger women. The CDC in Atlanta estimated a frequency of 54 cases in 14 million vaccinations. This can be a serious condition, but COVID-19 infection is much more likely to induce thrombosis than vaccination, so the CDC is continuing to monitor reports of thrombotic complications and has not pulled any of the vaccines from the market due to this issue. Younger women might be able to avoid the risk of the thrombosis syndrome by taking an mRNA vaccine instead of the J & J vaccine.

The LD 867 language also mentions the possibility of “reproductive harm”. Not having trained in this field, I cannot testify from training or experience, but concerns about this issue do not seem to have panned out, and many women who had received the vaccine in the clinical trials became pregnant at about the same rate as those who had received placebo injections. There is no biologically plausible mechanism for the currently approved vaccines to interfere with fertility.

Overall, the severity of the pandemic suggests that strong public health measures are necessary. Of course vaccine mandates can be intrusive, but the benefit for cancer patients and immunosuppressed patients like me far outweighs the risk to healthcare workers. Our lives are truly on the line.

I strongly recommend a vote of “Ought Not to Pass”. I would urge any member of the legislature or the interested public to contact me regarding this testimony.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Reference: Martinez-Lopez, J, Hernandez-Ibarburu et. Al: Impact of COVID-19 in patients with multiple myeloma based on a global data network  
Blood Cancer Journal (2021)11:198; <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41408-021-00588-z>