

May Couch
Bristol

Dear Senator Claxon, Representative Meyer and esteemed committee members:

I am a registered nurse, and I was forced to resign from my position as a staff nurse in a long-term care/skilled nursing facility in Mid-coast Maine in October of 2021, because I refused to take the Covid-19 vaccine that was mandated by Maine Health. Both my medical and religious exemption requests were denied without even any consideration by human resources. I was told by my director of nursing that both requests would most likely be declined. After several attempts to reach my doctor to request the medical exemption, I finally received a return call, and I was told by staff at their office that they would not be able to find any reason to write a letter recommending an exemption despite the fact that I have a history of cancer. I felt that I should have been allowed the medical exemption because taking this experimental vaccine could potentially put my health at risk. When I requested the religious exemption, it was also declined because the Catholic church is a hierarchal church, and the pope has encouraged Catholics to take the vaccine, which I disagree with for various reasons.

I have been searching for employment as a nurse here in the state of Maine since I left my job, but I have not found anything, because all jobs in nursing in the state of Maine at this time require the Covid-19 vaccine. The loss of income has been extremely difficult for my family, and I have two special needs autistic children, which makes the loss of my job even more of a hardship as my husband barely has enough income to meet all of our needs. Additionally, I have been in touch with some of my coworkers who are still working in this facility, and they informed me that their skilled unit had to be shut down due to loss of qualified nurses and CNAs because of the mandate. This poses a health risk for patients in my community who are in need of skilled care. I was recently informed that 8 patients in my former facility have contracted the Omicron strain of Covid-19, and they are fully vaccinated. The loss of staff has created a crisis situation for the staff who are trying their best to care for these patients, and the effects have been devastating. I urge you to pass LD 867 to alleviate the burden that the covid-19 vaccine mandate has had on families, communities, and qualified nurses and healthcare workers like me who are now struggling to provide for our families due to loss of income. If we can wait 5 years to see the effects of this vaccine, and I am assured that it is safe, I would likely consider taking the vaccine. This is a reasonable request, and I commend you for writing this act to prohibit the vaccine mandates.

Thank you,
May Ellan Couch