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Clinton

Greetings Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Service Committee.

My name is Karen Harrington and I am from the little town of Clinton. I am a wife, a mother of four, a nurse, and now an educator. I am submitting this written testimony in support of LD 867, An Act to Prohibit Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccinations for 5 Years to Allow for Safety Testing and Investigations into Reproductive Harm.

I was a nurse for 16 years at the same little rural hospital (Redington Fairview General Hospital) until this fall. Fifteen of those years were in the Birthing Center. I left my full time position at RFGH as soon as I heard about the Maine healthcare worker vaccine mandate, but stayed per diem until the vaccine mandate took effect. At the end of August, I began my new career in education. I am now teaching College Prep Biology and College Prep Chemistry at a private school. I am also the Nurse Manager and Ultrasound Nurse for a pregnancy center, with plans to implement free STD testing at the center next year.

I was absolutely devastated to leave my job at the hospital. When I graduated nursing school at 19 years old, I had the Florence Nightingale fantasy of being a nurse. I just wanted to help people and care for people. And I did just that for 16 years. I also precepted new nurses to our unit and floated to every other unit of the hospital to help when it was busy.

I intended to spend my entire nursing career doing direct patient care. I always told people that I would retire from floor nursing. Everything I have done in the last 16 years while employed by RFGH was to further advance my education in my role as a labor & delivery, postpartum, and nursery nurse. I became a Certified Lactation Counselor in 2017. I received a BSN in June of 2021, after almost four years of working towards it. I took 17 3-credit classes while working full-time 12-hour night shifts (during a pandemic no less), having four children, and caring for my mother in my home as she died of cancer at the age of 51 after a three-year battle. I worked so hard for that degree, which feels useless and futile now.

I have to start paying back the student loans for that degree this year. Originally, that wouldn't have been a problem for me. But now, even with two jobs, I am making  $\frac{1}{3}$  of what I was making, which is approximately \$50K less. I was the primary wage earner for our home when I was working at the hospital. My husband makes \$500 per week, no benefits. He's a pastor and always says this about his career: "I'm not in it for the income; I'm in it for the outcome." So that has been the biggest struggle for us: finances and lack of health insurance. When I worked at the hospital, I had medical & dental insurance, and life insurance for the whole family. Now, we have none of that. Truthfully, we would probably qualify for MaineCare right now, but we don't want to do that. I am considering picking up a per diem or travel nurse assignment in New Hampshire this summer since, as a teacher, I will have the summer off.

My coworkers were like family to me and I am still in regular contact with them. The working conditions in the hospital right now are atrocious. Short staffing has always plagued healthcare, but the levels of it over the last few months, since the vaccine mandate took effect, are unprecedented. I just looked at the job openings for RFGH and there are 12 full time nurse positions open for one unit alone (med surg). In the past, you would see one or two, three max, positions open at a time. Twelve positions. And this is for a little 25-bed rural facility. Mainers were promised the same excellent quality of healthcare after the vaccine mandate. Mainers are not getting what they were promised. Furthermore, fully vaccinated boosted healthcare workers are contracting Covid and spreading it (because, as we all know from emerging data, omicron is evading vaccine-acquired immunity). And, in response to the worker shortage, the CDC now says they can work after 5 days of quarantine as long as their symptoms are "improving." "Improvement" is completely relative and

there is no scientific data to support that they're no longer contagious. Healthcare workers are being pressured to work while still sick with Covid. So vaccinated Covid-positive nurses can work while still symptomatic after 5 days of quarantine (as long as they're "improving"), but I can't work because I'm not vaccinated. There is a serious lack of logic here. The real solution to this healthcare worker shortage crisis is much simpler than letting Covid-positive nurses work: eliminate/prevent vaccine mandates until we know more about their safety and efficacy long term, and hire back the 9000 healthcare workers who left. I know many Maine nurses who left and are now doing travel nursing in other states where the vaccine is not mandated.

When so many healthcare workers, those of us educated in various areas of science and medicine, are walking away from careers we worked so hard for and made a decent living in, over this vaccine, it should make policy-makers wonder why. I took all the other required vaccines when I became a nurse. And I've given hundreds of vaccines over the course of my career. When the Covid vaccine became available, I, along with many others, watched and waited. I followed the trials and all the vaccine-related data like a hawk. I watched my coworkers get vaccinated. One of my coworkers, a young, healthy mother in her late twenties, was among the first group vaccinated with the Moderna vaccine when it became available to RFGH. And then our unit watched her suffer for months with new onset cardiac issues. She saw multiple cardiologists, had a slew of tests, and tried various medications. She was having difficulty working and accomplishing her activities of daily living because of the cardiac episodes she was experiencing. A little over half of my unit was among that first group to take the vaccine. After the rest of us (5 nurses) saw what the vaccine did to Kristen, we never dared to take it. And, in fact, the Birthing Center lost four nurses over the vaccine mandate (out of 10 core full-time staff, not counting all the new grads they hired in anticipation of us leaving). The fifth nurse has still not taken it either, but has been out on medical leave since before the vaccine mandate.

There is a Covid vaccine being authorized for use in India. It is called Corbevex and was developed by Dr. Peter Hotez and Dr. Maria Elena Bottazzi in Texas. It uses old, but proven, vaccine technology. This is a vaccine that I would actually consider taking if it became available to us, after I felt confident in the published data, trial results, postmarketing data, and such.

I urge you all to please vote ought to pass on LD 867.

Respectfully & Prayerfully,  
Karen Harrington, RN, BSN, CLC