

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and Esteemed Committee Members,

Thank you for your time today to address this important matter of LD867. I urge you to vote “ought to pass”.

My name is Sherri Thornton. I reside in Burnham, Maine. I hold a state of Maine registered nursing license which has been current since 1976. I have 45 years of nursing experience and over 20 years in both forensic and emergency medicine.

When I saw the vaccination mandate coming, I knew I would be more fortunate than others as I am eligible for retirement from my nursing career. Although I knew taking retirement would leave patients that would suffer without trauma informed forensic care, I felt I had no other choice. I feared the vaccination because I didn't know what it would do to me physically. I hold strong religious convictions regarding vaccine content. Not being able to know exactly what is in this vaccine and after discussion with my family I chose not to take it.

My job was to give trauma informed care to those suffering from sexual assault, domestic violence, elder abuse, and child abuse. These patients need intense care that takes time, sometimes as much as 6 to 8 hours and resources.

Both things are no longer available in the emergency rooms of our Maine hospitals with few exceptions. Most forensic nurses in Maine are also ER or Maternal/Child health nurses. They are already working full time and more. They are resigning their forensic positions to try to keep up with their full-time positions or because they are against the mandate, thus they are leaving the work force.

I am one of those nurses. I have natural immunity after having Covid-19 and it is not recognized in any way. I worked through the worst of the pandemic. I would still be working and caring for those patients I have mentioned if the mandate was not in place. I would be taking just a little bit of the pressure off my fellow healthcare workers if I was allowed to work. I would not have retired I would STILL BE THERE.

Since my departure from my forensic program coordinator position all but one of the forensic nurses serving 6 hospital campuses have resigned. The one left works full time in a travel position and is only available occasionally for these patients. These patients in some cases face severe injury or death without the resources we provided. Maine's homicide numbers are 50% from domestic violence homicides (Maine Homicide Review Panel Report). Trauma informed care helps lower these numbers and gives these patients hope.

I have such anxiety about these patients “falling through the cracks”, especially the children because I have seen that they are considered “not sick” so with increased wait times they are waiting so long in some cases they leave without care. I have held in my arms a child with unimaginable injury and patients that have been violated in ways you can only imagine. I have performed over 300 forensic cases, that is 300 community members from infant to adult that I have been there for the worst day of their lives. I was their voice; I was their safety.

Stopping this mandate would allow many of us to go back to clinical care. We are seeing that being vaccinated is not a deterrent to acquiring or spreading the virus so what good is it to keep those wanting to work out of the work force. Many of us have had Covid-19 and have natural immunity. We would never intentionally endanger our patients.

I am asking that you vote LD867 as ought to pass to prohibit mandatory vaccinations for covid-19 for 5 years from the date of a vaccine's first emergency use authorization by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Food and Drug Administration to allow for safety testing and investigations into reproductive harm. Thank you for your time today, it is greatly appreciated.