

Testimony on vaccination bills LD 798 and LD 987  
Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

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Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield, other members of the committee, I am Dr Sam Zager, a family physician in Portland, speaking for Maine Providers Standing Up for Healthcare, and the Maine Academy of Family Physicians as a board member.

I think I know what you're expecting to hear from me:

- That I'm testifying in favor of LD 798 and against 987;
- that ensuring vulnerable children can attend disease-free schools is vital to Maine's educational and health goals;
- that the evidence favoring vaccination vs not is about as lopsided as the evidence in favor of having a functioning parachute if you have to jump out of a plane;
- that for millennia, people have suffered and often died from demons named things like diphtheria, tetanus, polio, and measles;
- that through the scientific method and tremendous determination, Jenner and Salk and other heroes managed to imprison the whole gang of these monsters with something as elegant as a vaccine.

That's all true.

But others today are eloquently making those points.

Instead, I want to focus on the economic impact of effective vaccination.

To do important things like funding schools and marching toward universal health coverage, Maine needs money. If one wishes to expand education, health, or social services; and/or if one wishes to reduce taxes, then you'll be interested in the following.

Vaccination not only saves lives and illness, but it also saves boatloads of money. In the wake of a measles outbreak in Washington State, last Tuesday, Secretary of Health Dr John Weisman pointed out that vaccines save about \$16 for every dollar spent.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the public costs of under-vaccination are increasing. In February, Children's Hospital Colorado estimated that under-vaccinated children cost that state \$55 million;<sup>2</sup> it was a significant increase from just two years prior, as vaccination rates dropped.

Another estimate comes from a much larger, system-wide study in the very reputable peer-reviewed journal *Health Affairs* in 2016.<sup>3</sup> It estimated that the total economic burden of illnesses with childhood vaccines was \$8.2 billion annually. Maine's portion would be \$33 million each year, but perhaps more because our vaccination rates are among

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Wiesman.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.denverpost.com/2019/02/06/anti-vax-colorado-vaccines-children-costs/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2016.0462>

the worst in the country. And this study may have underestimated the potential costs of undervaccination. I'd be happy to elaborate during question time.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, vaccines are safe and effective; they save lives and money.

Thank you.

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<sup>4</sup> Ozawa et al estimated the per-case cost of tetanus would be around \$6,000, but an actual case was orders of magnitude more. The federal Centers for Disease Control reported this month on the Oregon case of a six year-old boy whose two-month hospitalization for tetanus cost over \$800,000. Fortunately, he survived (and the parents subsequently continued to refuse to vaccinate him).