



SUIT UP MAINE

May 6, 2021

Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Brennan, and Honorable members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

We offer this testimony in opposition to LD 96, LD 156, LD 833, and LD 1082 on behalf of Suit Up Maine, an independent, all-volunteer constituent action group representing more than 5,000 Mainers in all 16 counties.

This suite of bills would greatly undermine a strong public health law we helped pass in 2019 that was upheld last year by nearly 73% of Maine voters. That law passed at a time when Maine had the highest pertussis rate in the nation¹, a non-medical opt-out rate more than three times the national average², and more than 40 elementary schools with vaccination rates below 85%³. The law maintained medical exemptions, expanded the number of medical professionals who could write them to include nurse practitioners and physician assistants, and left the decision for exemption eligibility to parents and their child's health care providers. It was championed by every major medical society and medical care facility in Maine, faith-based groups across the state, parents, and educators. And it was affirmed by nearly two-thirds of voters in a popular election.

In their support for this law, Mainers recognized the vital contribution vaccines make to public health. Between 1994 and 2013, childhood vaccinations in the U.S. prevented an estimated 322 million illnesses, 21 million hospitalizations, and 732,000 deaths over the course of their lifetimes, with a savings of \$1.38 trillion in societal costs.⁴ High vaccine coverage, enabled by strong school-entry mandates with the allowance for medical

¹ 2018 Final Pertussis Surveillance Report. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/downloads/pertuss-surv-report-2018-508.pdf>

² 2018-2019 Maine School Immunization Assessment Report. Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://bit.ly/3epRYOe>

³ Maine School Age Vaccination Survey Results 2018-2019. <https://bit.ly/3b87hZT>

⁴ Impact Analysis Maine Vaccine Board Maine Universal Access to Childhood Vaccines. 2020 Sept 22. <https://bit.ly/3xRDFtv>

exemptions, supports the public health goal of reducing preventable infectious diseases and reducing disruptions that outbreaks bring to our schools and communities, as the nation has seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. A decision not to vaccinate imperils the health and safety of entire communities, especially those who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons. Thirty-four states, including Maine, recognize the public health benefits of vaccinations and have prohibited exemptions for reasons of personal belief.

Maine and the world have had an unfortunate glimpse this past year of how quickly an infectious virus can sweep through schools, workplaces, places of worship, residential facilities, and our homes. The end result, as we all know, has been more than a half a million deaths, millions of infections, and long-term illness that forced business closures and a deeply disruptive school year. This public health crisis is exactly what vaccines are designed to prevent. Maine cannot afford an outbreak of measles, chickenpox, or pertussis that harms our most vulnerable citizens. Our strong vaccine law must be protected. We urge you to vote Ought Not to Pass on all four of these bills.

Thank you.

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