Testimony of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention
Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
In Opposition of LD 172, An Act to Allow Health Care Workers to Return to Work by
Reinstating Exemptions from Immunization Requirements

Hearing Date: April 24, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Ann Farmer and I am the Associate Director of the Division of Disease Surveillance at the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention at the Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to provide testimony on behalf of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention and will be speaking against LD 172, An Act to Allow Health Care Workers to Return to Work by Reinstating Exemptions from Immunization Requirements.

This bill seeks to reinstate religious and philosophical exemptions from immunization requirements for health care workers. Maine CDC strongly opposes this bill.

Public Law 2019, chapter 154 was enacted for three reasons: keeping Mainers safe and healthy from unnecessary disease; ensuring safe schools, health care facilities, and childcare centers; and protecting vulnerable people against serious disease. The removal of religious and philosophical exemptions was decided through legislative process and upheld by a referendum vote in 2020 with 72% of Mainers in favor of this decision.

Immunization is the most effective and efficient way to protect healthcare workers, their family members, and patients, particularly those who are immunocompromised, against serious, and sometimes deadly, vaccine preventable diseases. It is the best interest of all Mainers to ensure healthcare workers receive recommended Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) immunizations. When someone chooses not to vaccinate, that decision can jeopardize the health and safety of entire communities, especially the weakest and most vulnerable among us. Evidence shows that states that have tighter exemption laws have higher immunization rates, and less disease.

In summary, the Maine CDC opposes the proposed legislation. Good public health policy is data-driven and evidence-based. Maine’s immunization requirements are to ensure full protection of all Maine children and adults from vaccine-preventable disease. Reinstating exemptions will result in fewer vaccinations for vaccine-preventable diseases, statewide. The evidence is overwhelming, sound, and supported by the professional medical community and majority of Maine voters; vaccinations are proven to be safe and effective for preventing the spread of disease.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter and for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I can address questions from the Committee, and I will be available to participate in the work session.