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Testimony of the Maine Osteopathic Association  
Before the Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs

In Reference to:

**LD 798, "An Act To Protect Maine Children and Students from Preventable Diseases by Repealing Certain Exemptions from the Laws Governing Immunization Requirements"**  
Public Hearing: Wednesday, March 13, 2019 , Cross Building, Room 208

Senator Millet, Representative Victoria Kornfield, and distinguished members of the Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is David Scaccia, DO, MPH. I am board certified in Family Medicine and Preventative and Occupational Medicine and I practice in Kittery, ME. As the President-elect of the Maine Osteopathic Association and Chair of the Legislative Committee, I am pleased to provide testimony on behalf of my physician colleagues in support of **LD 798, An Act To Protect Maine Children and Students from Preventable Diseases by Repealing Certain Exemptions from the Laws Governing Immunization Requirements.**

The Maine Osteopathic Association is a professional organization representing approximately 400 osteopathic physicians and an additional 500 residents and students. Our mission is to "serve the Osteopathic profession of the State of Maine through a coordinated effort of professional education, advocacy and member services in order to ensure the availability of quality osteopathic health care to the people of this State."

LD798 proposes immunization as a condition for public school entry by removing 'philosophical reasons' and 'religious belief' as allowable exemptions in an effort to strengthen the safety of schools and daycare by ensuring that children who attend are up to date on certain immunizations. This bill would not disrupt the use of medical exemptions in cases deemed appropriate by physicians.

The MOA is a strong supporter of childhood immunizations. There are 14 diseases that can be prevented with routine childhood vaccination, including Measles, Pertussis, Mumps, Hepatitis, Polio, Varicella, etc. The side effects and risks of contracting any of these 14 diseases including everything from the child being uncomfortable with fever, chills, and vomiting to drastic outcomes like heart failure, paralysis or even death. Most childhood vaccines are 90% to 99% effective in preventing disease.<sup>1</sup> The safety of vaccines is thoroughly studied before they are licensed for public use and there is a strong system in place to monitor the safety of vaccines. As is the case with any medicine, vaccines can cause side effects. However, serious adverse events from vaccines are very rare.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. (2018). <https://www.healthychildren.org/english/safety-prevention/immunizations/pages/vaccine-safety-the-facts.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). <https://www.cdc.gov/Features/VaccineSafety/>

While vaccines have proven to eradicate many serious diseases such as polio, the rise of misinformation about vaccines has led to higher voluntary exemption rates and therefore greater risk of outbreak. Measles outbreaks have sprung up in ten states in the US in 2019, infecting more than 150 people<sup>3</sup> and here in Maine pertussis is on the rise, with 55 reported cases in January 2019, up from 24 in January 2018<sup>4</sup>.

In 2017-2018, Maine had the 7<sup>th</sup> highest non-medical vaccine exemption rate in the country, a rate which has increased significantly over the last 7 years from 3.5% to 5.0%<sup>5</sup>. Researchers have repeatedly shown that when it's easier for parents to avoid vaccines, vaccine exemptions rise. When exemption rates climb, herd immunity is weakened and the risk of outbreak rises.

The Maine Osteopathic Association understands parents have concerns about immunizations and that today's parents can access information about vaccines from a wide array of sources including the news media, the internet, other parents, family members and many other sources. Unfortunately, some parents may have difficulty understanding between accurate and inaccurate information or the credibility of the source. The facts and the research are clear: Vaccines are safe, effective and the key to reducing vaccine-preventable diseases in our communities<sup>6</sup>.

With Maine's non-medical exemption rate double the national average, Maine's children are at risk of outbreak of measles and several other diseases which could be prevented by vaccines. Further, vulnerable Mainers who medically cannot receive vaccines are also at an increased risk for disease under the current system. Requiring immunizations in Maine schools and daycares helps to ensure that they are safe spaces for learning and that children and staff do not need to miss school or daycare due to an outbreak. It is for these reasons the MOA urges the committee to support LD 798.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at [info@mainedo.org](mailto:info@mainedo.org) if you have any questions. Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Measles Cases and Outbreaks (Feb 25, 2019). <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/cases-outbreaks.html>

<sup>4</sup> ME DHHS: CDC Maine Monthly Pertussis Surveillance Report. <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/infectious-disease/epi/vaccine/documents/January-2019-Monthly-Report.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Mellerson JL, Maxwell CB, Knighton CL, Kriss JL, Seither R, Black CL. Vaccination Coverage for Selected Vaccines and Exemption Rates Among Children in Kindergarten — United States, 2017–18 School Year. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2018;67:1115–1122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6740a3>

<sup>6</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics. *Healthy Children.org: Examine the Evidence*. (2018). <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/immunizations/Pages/Vaccine-Studies-Examine-the-Evidence.aspx>