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TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
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
AND IN OPPOSITION TO LD 987,
AN ACT TO PROVIDE AUTONOMY FOR HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS TO PRACTICE
PATIENT-CENTERED CARE BY AMENDING THE LAWS GOVERNING
MEDICAL EXEMPTIONS TO IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Room 208, Cross State Office Building
Wednesday, March 13, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Peter Michaud, General Counsel for the Maine Medical Association (MMA), chair of the Maine Immunization Coalition Steering Committee, and a registered nurse licensed to practice in Maine. I live in Readfield, and I am speaking 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 and in opposition to LD 987, An Act to Provide Autonomy for Health Care Providers to Practice Patient-centered Care by Amending the Laws Governing Medical Exemptions to Immunization Requirements.

The MMA is a professional association representing more than 4,300 physicians, residents, and medical students in Maine whose mission is to support Maine physicians, advance the quality of medicine in Maine, and promote the health of all Maine citizens. We represent physicians from all medical specialties, as well as pediatrics, public health and primary care.

The Maine Immunization Coalition is a group of Maine healthcare organizations that includes:

American Academy of Pediatrics – Maine Chapter
Cary Medical Center
Maine Association of Health Plans
Maine Family Planning
Maine General
Maine Hospital Association
Maine Medical Association
Maine Nurse Practitioner Association
Maine Osteopathic Association
Maine Pharmacy Association
Maine Primary Care Association

MaineHealth
Martin's Point Health Care
Nasson Health Care
Northern Light Health Care
Planned Parenthood of Northern New England
Medical providers
Public health experts

You have heard a great deal about these bills and about the issue of school immunization requirements. Much of what you have heard is not accurate. For example, I understand the claim has been made in a floor sheet that "LD 798 is a vaccine sales bill sponsored by the pharmaceutical industry." I can testify that the pharmaceutical industry had nothing whatsoever to do with the drafting or sponsorship of this bill. There is much more, but I will leave the medical questions to the experts who will testify after me. May I suggest that doctors are in a much better position to say what doctors can and cannot do, and what they do in practice, than are the authors of the floor sheet in question or the lay persons testifying on these bills.

LD 798 is very simple and limited in its scope. It repeals the religious and philosophical exemptions to the school, day care, and healthcare immunization requirements. It does not touch the medical exemption part of the statute. This bill does not change the DHHS and DoE rules. The practice of school nurses has been to accept "a physician's written statement that immunization against one or more of the diseases may be medically inadvisable," as stated in the statute and rules. They have not treated the list in Section 3 (B) as exclusive. I have checked my understanding with both the DHHS and the DoE, with school nurses, and with physicians who issue medical exemptions. You will hear from some of them. Their statements are general in nature and do not track the list of examples in the rules.

This is not a bill about the medicine and the science of vaccines; yet, those opposing LD 798 have made and, I anticipate, will make today a variety of claims on that issue. For that reason, it is incumbent on the bill's supporters to respond. You will hear pediatricians, the physicians who care for children and administer the vast majority of childhood immunizations, testify about the science and medicine of vaccines, vaccine side-effects, vaccine ingredients, and other medical issues. You will hear testimony from families about why it is a bad idea to have numbers of unimmunized children in public spaces like public schools. You will hear legal discussions about whether it is constitutional to require immunization for school attendance (it is). You will hear about the experience of those who are, for medical reasons, immunosuppressed and at risk from those around them.

I ask you to consider the knowledge, education, training, and experience of the various witnesses who will testify about the effects of vaccines.

On behalf of the MMA and the Maine Immunization Coalition, and on behalf of my uncle Camille Michaud who died of polio in 1959 at the age of 30, I respectfully ask you to vote LD 798 "Ought to Pass" and LD 987 "Ought Not to Pass." I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.