

Testimony of Dr. Norma Dreyfus
In Support of LD 798 and
In Opposition to LD 987

Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Room 208, Cross State Office Building
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Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Dr. Norma Dreyfus. I am a retired Pediatrician from Arrowsic testifying in favor of LD 798 and in opposition to LD 987.

Vaccinations: It's a risk benefit issue. Vaccine risk versus diseases with potentially high morbidity and mortality.

Being an old retired Pediatrician gives me the privilege of sharing some of my experiences in the "old days", before the measles vaccine was prevalent and before hemophilus influenza, pneumococcal vaccines and others were available.

As house officers we rotated through a ward called *Basement South*, every 6 months. This was the infectious disease ward. There were several of the same children who I would see at each rotation, lying in the same position, on their backs, arms flexed at the elbows, unresponsive. These children had the diagnosis of measles encephalitis. They had become permanent residents of the hospital. Other children on the ward were having difficulty breathing, another complication of measles. And there were still others with what would later become vaccine preventable diseases as well.

I went on to teach at the medical school and my favorite office was down in the basement, in *Basement South*. The office was small, no windows, down a long corridor. But what had been an infectious disease ward was no longer needed because of the development of vaccines and the whole floor could be made into just offices instead of a floor of children with horrific illnesses.

Oh, and how about the cardiac clinic we rotated through as medical students. I can still picture the children sitting on the examining tables with hearing aides in each ear, who had heart disease too. Diagnosis? Their mothers had rubella during pregnancy.

And what about waiting in the emergency room for your patient to arrive who couldn't breathe because of hemophilus influenza epiglottitis, hoping they would make it to the hospital in time to have a breathing tube placed before their wind pipe closed off.

After retiring to Maine, I was on the telephone with a former colleague of mine and asked to which hospital he was now admitting his patients. He said no hospital.

Now that the hemophilus and pneumococcal vaccines had become available, there was no need for the hospitalization of children in his area.

I could go on and on about the “old days” and they were *not* the “good old days”. The miracle in medicine through my years as a physician was the development of vaccines so children and families no longer had to suffer with these potentially horrendous diseases. Hospital Pediatric wards could be closed and the space used for offices.

The issue to me now is that todays parents did not live through the time prior to the availability of these vaccines. They have not personally experienced these illnesses in their communities. The vaccination program in our country has all but wiped them out. When deciding whether to withhold vaccination from their children they see only risks which are small to none, indeed, especially when compared to the alternative.

My fear now is that with so many children unimmunized, we will be going back to the “old days” seeing these diseases once again. We will need more *Basement Souths*.

LD 798 will get more children protected and help to prevent the emergence of these potentially devastating illnesses, and we need to put it into law. We must not remove state rulemaking from the vaccination process. I urge you to vote in favor of LD 798 and against LD 987.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions.