



**State of Maine
130th Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Education
Testimony of Caroline Zimmerman
On behalf of the Maine Immunization Coalition
May 6, 2021**

Opposing

- L.D. 96 An Act To Create Fairness in the Treatment of Students by Retaining Students with Certain Vaccine Exemptions
- L.D. 156 An Act To Promote School Attendance by Exempting Virtual Public Charter School and Private School Students from Immunization Requirements
- L.D. 833 An Act To Amend the Laws Governing Vaccines by Reinstating Religious Exemptions
- L.D. 1082 An Act To Improve Educational Opportunities by Exempting Children Who Attend Virtual Public Charter Schools from Immunization Requirements and Expanding Enrollment at Virtual Public Charter Schools

Thank you, Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.

I am Caroline Zimmerman, Chair of the Maine Immunization Coalition (MIC). The MIC is a membership organization founded in 2008 and comprised of leading health care organizations and individuals committed to supporting evidence-based policies that result in improved immunization rates for children and adults in the State of Maine.

The Maine Immunization Coalition strongly Opposes LD96, LD156, LD833 and LD1082, which all seek to roll back the progress made by the 129th Legislature in 2019 and resoundingly supported by Maine voters.

In the interest of time and because our concerns are the same for all of these bills, we are presenting this testimony in person and providing copies of this testimony for the other bills. The MIC stands ready to provide information as may be required by the Committee.

Prevention is the most cost effective, lifesaving medical care. The development of vaccines is one of the most significant public health achievements in the history of medicine. The importance of vaccines and vaccine information cannot be overstated both in the impact on individuals and families and the health of the economy, as we have learned so painfully during COVID.

Since March of 2020, educators and policy makers around the state and country have been concerned about ways to reasonably and safely support education in the midst of the COVID pandemic. This is not the first time that the US has struggled with in person education during a disease outbreak. In 1918 some communities chose to close schools due to the flu pandemic¹ in 1937 Chicago and other schools

¹ <https://www.businessinsider.com/spanish-flu-pandemic-1918-precautions-us-cities-2020-4>



closed due to polio and children had lessons by radio². Both polio and the flu are now addressed by safe and effective vaccines and COVID is on its way to being managed.

While 2020 is not be the first time that Maine and US have battled pandemic disease, by using the science of vaccines we could make it one of the last times.

Closing schools due to COVID has been very challenging. Imagine if every year schools would need to consider how to educate students because of an influenza, measles, mumps or other vaccine preventable disease outbreak. Rolling back vaccine requirements could result in that very outcome.

Vaccine preventable diseases are just that- preventable. Preventing disease before children and adults are sick, incapacitated or perish; before schools and other public spaces need to be closed and before the economy is impacted. We have an obligation to care for and protect our children, and that includes a reasonable, science-based vaccination schedule.

The bills before you today seek to roll back the progress made by the 129th Legislature in 2019 and resoundingly supported by Maine voters when 72.6% voted to maintain the standards in PL 154-Maines Vaccine Law.

The members of the MIC believe that the important work ahead is implementing PL 154 and we stand ready to assist your Committee in that process.

Please forward any questions to MIC c/o Marge Kil Kelly at MKilkelly@mepca.org

Caroline Zimmerman, Chair
Maine Immunization Coalition

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2020/04/03/chicago-schools-closed-during-1937-polio-epidemic-kids-learned-home-over-radio/>