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Maine Medical Center  
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MaineGeneral Health  
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New England Rehabilitation  
Hospital of Portland  
St. Mary's Health System

**Testimony of Rebecca Hemphill, MD, FACP  
Maine Medical Partners  
Governor of the Maine Chapter of the American College of  
Physicians  
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”  
March 13, 2019**

Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Rebecca Hemphill and I practice as an internal medicine physician with Maine Medical Partners and MaineHealth, I have a general internal medicine practice in Falmouth, and I am the current Governor of the Maine Chapter of the American College of Physicians (ACP). On behalf of both Maine Medical Partners and the Maine Chapter of the ACP, I am here to testify in support of LD 798 and in opposition to LD 987.

The obvious focus of LD 798 is on the health and safety of children, but as an Internist, I want to speak to the critical importance of this bill for the health and safety of the adult population in our State as well.

An important preventable infectious disease that I see in my patients is pertussis or “whooping cough.” We know from Maine CDC data that in 2018 there were 446 pertussis cases reported statewide, compared to the 5-year median of 317 reported cases. Most of these cases are in children, with a number of outbreaks occurring in schools, however, 10% of these cases are in adults over the age of 20.

According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), pertussis vaccines are very effective, but protection decreases over time, also known as ‘waning immunity.’ Adults, including the elderly, and especially those with decreased immunity are particularly at risk during a pertussis outbreak.

The incubation period for pertussis is 7-10 days, with the early symptoms being mild and non-specific, meaning that people who are infectious can be out in public places, unknowingly exposing others, including those with decreased immunity. The most common symptom for adults with pertussis

is a prolonged cough, which can be quite severe and last for weeks. Importantly, the severity of illness and risk of hospitalization is highest in patients over 65 years of age and patients with immune compromise.

Additionally, I have significant concerns with LD 987 because it would allow medical exemptions beyond the current standards, which follow the US CDC standards for medical exemptions for vaccines. It is important to note that that LD 798 does not change the current process or standards for medical exemptions.

LD 798 is important for the health of our whole community and for that reason, I urge the Committee to support LD 798 and to oppose LD 987. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.