



February 2, 2022

Representative Rick Ladd, Chairman
House Education Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 207
33 N. State Street
Concord, NH 03301
Email: HouseEducationCommittee@leg.state.nh.us

RE: HB 1332 excepting public universities and colleges from requirements under medical freedom in immunizations

Dear Chairman Ladd and the members of the Education Committee:

Bi-State Primary Care Association and our members respectfully request HB 1332, excepting public universities and colleges from requirements under medical freedom in immunizations, be recommended ought to pass. Bi-State staff and our members will not attend legislative hearings due to the risk of COVID-19, and we thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to your committee electronically. Bi-State and our members write to you in support of HB 1332 because it clarifies that colleges and universities can utilize vaccinations as a tool to protect students by preventing the spread of preventable diseases.

Bi-State Primary Care Association (Bi-State) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, formed by two health and social service leaders in 1986 to advance access to comprehensive primary care and preventive services for all, with special emphasis on those most in need in New Hampshire and Vermont. Today, Bi-State represents 28 member organizations across both states that provide comprehensive primary care services to over 300,000 patients at 146 locations. Our members include community health centers (CHCs), federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), rural health clinics (RHCs), area health education center programs, and Planned Parenthood of Northern New England. New Hampshire's 13 health centers serve approximately 112,000 patients at locations across the state, including in those districts represented by the members of this esteemed committee.

Bi-State and our members support HB 1332 because it will help colleges and universities protect students by mitigating the spread of preventable diseases.

New Hampshire, like all states, requires childhood vaccinations to attend school.¹ The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also recommend vaccinations for adults of all ages, including Tdap, Td, HPV, influenza, and shingles. These vaccinations help prevent the spread of germs in classrooms and communal living spaces such as dorms and multi-bedroom apartments. Public health measures, such as mask and vaccination requirements, are designed to protect all community members, including those who cannot wear masks or be vaccinated, to help prevent the spread of deadly diseases.

¹ See Chapter He-P 300 Diseases last accessed on Jan. 31, 2022.

Unlike K-12 schools, New Hampshire's colleges and universities have instituted mask and vaccination requirements and have much different and better outcomes than our K-12 schools. On January 19th, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) reported there were 117 active COVID-19 clusters in the K-12 schools, with an average of 12.8 cases per cluster.² The Department also reported 40 active childcare clusters. There are likely several factors that caused the drastic rise in pediatric cases, and the rise in school and childcare clusters, including the lack of mask mandates. We know that employing mitigation measures such as masks in schools prevents the spread of disease. On January 3rd, one health center reported it received over 600 calls from parents and caregivers calling for COVID-19 tests for children. COVID-19 will continue to overwhelm our health care system if we do not slow the spread of disease.

It is also important to remember college and university students are not isolated from members of their communities: Students go to grocery stores, restaurants, parks, health care facilities, and more. Additionally, New Hampshire colleges and universities offer health profession certificates and degrees. The health care organizations that those students will receive clinical training at will likely require vaccinations due to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid vaccination requirements.

New Hampshire is suffering from some of our highest numbers of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths since the beginning of the pandemic. On February 2nd, approximately 60% of New Hampshire's reported COVID-19 cases were in those under 18 years old, the highest percentage of pediatric cases to date. The State also reports 54 open outbreaks in New Hampshire institutions that include communal settings such as long-term care facilities and prisons.²

The lack of immunizations, masks in schools, and other mitigation measures in our communities is eroding our health care system's ability to respond to urgent primary care needs: Primary care providers across the state cannot prioritize their regular patient visits because their staff are responding to COVID-19. Utilizing a package of mitigation strategies is economically prudent, will reduce the number of health care workers taking care of a sick child, and will, most importantly, save lives. College campuses are small communities and are large employers in New Hampshire. We cannot eliminate their ability to mitigate the spread of disease.

For these reasons and more, Bi-State Primary Care Association and our members respectfully request the Committee recommend HB 1332 ought to pass.

Sincerely,

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² NH DHHS COVID-19 Press Release February 2, 2022