



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 1233 prohibiting higher education institutions receiving state funds from requiring face masks and COVID-19 vaccinations for attendance

Dear Chairman Ladd and the members of the Education Committee:

Bi-State Primary Care Association and our members respectfully request HB 1233, prohibiting higher education institutions receiving state funds from requiring face masks and COVID-19 vaccinations for attendance, be recommended inexpedient to legislate. 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 strong opposition of HB 1233 because it will result in limiting educational institutions' ability to mitigate the spread of deadly disease and will result in an increase in COVID-19 cases.

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 oppose HB 1233 because it will prohibit New Hampshire's universities and colleges from enacting public health measures designed to minimize the spread of infectious 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. If HB 1233 as introduced were to become law, our colleges and universities will be prohibited from requiring students be vaccinated against deadly diseases to attend school. HB 1233 also prohibits colleges and universities from adopting mask or facial covering requirements to minimize the spread of COVID-19 or any other infectious disease. 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. It is completely irresponsible to prohibit mitigation measures that will prevent the spread of deadly diseases.

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. Why would we want to prohibit colleges and universities from taking steps to prevent disease when college students are also in close quarters with fellow classmates and teachers? On January 19th, the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services 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. Masks are the only thing keeping children who are not old enough to be vaccinated safe. 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. Eliminating the ability of the State and local authorities to require masks to prevent disease spread will undoubtedly increase the number of COVID-19 cases and burden our health care system even more than it is today. 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 not only some of our highest numbers of COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, and deaths since the beginning of the pandemic, but also extraordinary staffing shortages that are impacting all residents and their ability to access primary and emergency care. Staffing shortages at CHCs are *not* due to vaccine requirements; ~5% of their workforce is currently out sick due solely to illness from COVID-19. This does not include their health care staff who are unable to go to work because they are at home caring for a

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

² NH DHHS COVID-19 Education and Childcare Partner Call (January 19, 2022)

<https://www.covid19.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt481/files/inline-documents/sonh/hcp-call-presentation-011922.pdf>

sick child, nor does it illustrate the incredible strain that working at reduced workforce capacity puts on the rest of their staff.

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 1233 be inexpedient to legislate.

Sincerely,

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