

# State Senate passes bill to establish 'medical freedom' from vaccination

Lone Senate doctor says bill "sends the wrong message"

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The New Hampshire Senate passed legislation to put limits on the state's ability to compel people to get vaccinated on Thursday.

Vaccine refusal received a shot in the arm from the state senate, as the Republican majority approved an amended version of House Bill 220, establishing what sponsors call "medical freedom" from immunizations.

"This was one of the most contentious bills that we've had all year," said Republican Majority Leader Sen. Jeb Bradley.

State law already had a religious exemption from vaccine mandates. This bill would stretch farther, in ways the senate's lone medical doctor believes are a danger to public health.

"As a doctor, this bill – as introduced and even as amended – sends the wrong message, especially since we're still in a pandemic," Sen. Tom Sherman said.

Supporters of the bill said it is narrowly tailored, too narrow for Sen. Bob Giuda, who worried it does not go far enough to stop schools from requiring COVID-19 vaccines for children.

"I think it is imperative because it is experimental – it's not even a vaccine, it's experimental, it's not approved. I think, unless the legislature were to say we shall determine it. I don't want school districts able to mandate the COVID vaccine for students," Giuda said.

There was push-back against this sentiment.

"Much of the push-back on this vaccine is based on misinformation, as we've seen in so much testimony, coming from people who signed on from other parts of the country," Sherman said.

Sherman said if this bill becomes law, it will reverse a decade of bipartisan work in New Hampshire to build trust in vaccines and public health. To skeptics of the COVID-19 vaccines, he said it is not some coincidence that case counts have dropped significantly.

"Just look at the numbers, look at the NH.gov dashboard," Sherman said. "Why would we ever consider putting this public health defense system now at risk?"