

# MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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# DOCUMENTS

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# THE LEGISLATURE

OF THE

STATE OF MAINE,

DURING THE SESSION

A. D. 1891.



AUGUSTA:  
BURLEIGH & FLYNT, PRINTERS TO THE STATE.  
1892.

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# Sixty-Fifth Legislature.

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SENATE.

No. 97.

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## STATE OF MAINE.

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IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD ONE THOUSAND EIGHT HUNDRED  
AND NINETY-ONE.

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### AN ACT for the Prevention of Blindness.

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*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives  
in Legislature assembled, as follows :*

SECTION 1. Should one or both eyes of an  
2 infant become reddened or inflamed at any time after  
3 birth it shall be the duty of the midwife, nurse or  
4 person having charge of said infant to report the  
5 condition of the eyes at once to some legally quali-  
6 fied practitioner of medicine of the city, town or  
7 district in which the parents of the infant reside.

SECT. 2. Any failure to comply with the provision of this act shall be punishable by a fine not to exceed one hundred dollars, or imprisonment not to exceed six months, or both.

SECT. 3. This act shall take effect on the first day of June, eighteen hundred and ninety-one.

## STATEMENT OF FACTS.

The importance of having this act passed by the Legislature, and having it become a law, is recognized by all physicians, without distinction, for should the reddened or inflamed condition of the eyes prove to be purulent inflammation, known as *ophthalmia neonatorum*, proper remedies can be applied, and the sight of the child saved. Some idea of the evil it is intended to remedy may be gained by reference to the statistics of the blind. According to the census of 1880, there were blind in the United States nearly 50,000, and in the State of Maine nearly 1,000. The census of 1890 will reveal the fact that the number is considerably larger at the present time; but, assuming that in round numbers they remain the same, we have in the United States 15,000, and in the State of Maine nearly 300, who have lost their sight from this one disease. These facts are sufficient to arouse the sympathies of the people to do something to prevent this enormous amount of misery and loss to the State. But as large as it may seem to those who have not considered the subject, it does not represent one-half of the misery endured by the unfortunate victims of this disease, nor one-half of the loss to the State, because where one becomes blind from it, many are seriously disabled thereby, and the statistics do not include these disastrous results. If one looks at it from an economical point of view, he will soon become convinced that it is for the highest interests of the community and State to have this act become a law. For if we take into consideration the loss of productiveness, and reckon the cost of taking care of the blind in consequence of their physical disability, the loss to the State amounts to more than one hundred thousand dollars per annum from this one disease. This does not include the loss from a much larger class who have escaped total blindness, but have been seriously disabled, crippled for life, and prevented from following occupations which would

develop their natural abilities to their fullest extent. This purulent inflammation of the eyes of infants is highly contagious, and other members of the household are liable to become infected, as the history of many cases show. Hence this act, when it becomes a law, will only enforce a duty one owes to humanity and self-protection. The disease is as surely preventable as any in medicine, when the proper remedies are applied upon its first appearance, and the object of this act is to call attention to this fact, and give the child the benefit of the treatment, or else throw the responsibility of not having it done upon some responsible party who may have charge of the child.

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## STATE OF MAINE.

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IN SENATE, February 17, 1891.

On motion by Mr. WILBUR of Franklin, laid on table to be printed, pending reference, in concurrence, to the Committee on the Judiciary.

KENDALL M. DUNBAR, *Secretary*.