



TO: The Honorable Representative Chris Garrett, Chair
House Rules Committee

FROM: Heather Kaisner
Immunization Program Coordinator
Deschutes County Health Services, Public Health

SUBJECT: SB 132

Chair Chris Garrett and Members of the House Rules Committee:

My name is Heather Kaisner, the Immunization Program Coordinator for Deschutes County Health Services. I am here today in support of Senate Bill 132.

Immunization is one of the greatest achievements in public health. Unfortunately, the success of immunizations in decreasing disease has led some parents to believe that immunizations are no longer needed. I have worked in the field of public health, specifically immunizations and communicable disease, for over a decade and have seen the immunization exemption rates for children entering kindergarten in Oregon dramatically increase from 1.9 percent in 2000 to 6.4 percent in 2013. Deschutes County's exemption rate for immunizations has gone from .4 percent in 2000 to 8 percent in 2013. These are alarming percentages.

This high exemption rate puts our community at greater risk for acquiring devastating vaccine-preventable diseases. This is especially true for those who are the most vulnerable such as children who can't be vaccinated because of age or medical condition. A school community needs at least a 94 percent immunization rate to keep potentially deadly diseases like measles and whooping

cough away from our children. We have pockets of schools in our county with less than 80% immunization coverage.

My job in public health is to help protect our community from disease and to educate parents on the facts and importance of immunizations in a respectful and helpful way. Ultimately, the decision to vaccinate or not vaccinate lies with the parent. We want parents to understand the risks of not vaccinating for any reason, whether it be personal, philosophical or religious. It's crucial that parents make an informed decision about immunization, especially when it affects the health of others around them. This bill doesn't infringe on anyone's rights; it simply gives parents the opportunity to learn more about immunizations and how their decisions affect others. Deschutes County supports this bill as an important step in reducing exemptions and protecting our children and our community.

Thank you for allowing me to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.