

HB 2896

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From the Desk of
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P.O.

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Dear Members of the Oregon House of Representatives,

On behalf of Oregon Health & Science University, I urge your support of House Bill 2896. As director of the OHSU Knight Cancer Institute, I have devoted my career to improving cancer treatment. While we have made significant progress in fighting cancer, there is still much work to be done. Even though some cancers are now highly treatable, prevention should still be a top priority.

House Bill 2896 restricts children younger than 18 from using indoor UV tanning devices, unless a physician provides an exemption. Evidence continues to mount that we are not doing enough to protect young people from skin cancer. In the past three decades, more people have had skin cancer than all other cancers combined. Further, the disease impacts Oregonians disproportionately. The melanoma death rate for women in Oregon is the highest in the country, and the state has the nation's 4th highest melanoma death rate overall.

The human toll that these statistics represent is deeply disturbing to me because skin cancer is highly preventable. We know that limiting exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light, especially in young people, is one of the best ways to prevent this disease.

The evidence is clear. Tanning booths, like cigarettes, cause cancer and they should be off limits to minors. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) categorizes tanning beds as a Level 1 carcinogen, the same designation it gives to tobacco. UV tanning beds are in the same category as tobacco, arsenic and mustard gas.

What many children and parents may not know is that the risks associated with UV exposure are even higher for minors than adults. One study found that people who engaged in indoor tanning before the age of 35 had a 75 percent higher risk of developing melanoma; the younger the exposure, the higher the risk.

Discouraging sunbed use or requiring parental authorization is not effective in addressing this risk. Studies indicate the use of tanning beds is as high as 40 percent among 16-18 year olds and coincides with a recent rise in melanoma incidence among young U.S. women.

There are safe alternatives to the use of tanning booths. Most tanning salons offer spray tanning that uses a chemical that the FDA deems as safe. In fact, there are several tanning salons in Oregon, which exclusively use the spray-tanning method. They have deliberately eliminated tanning booths due to their concern about causing cancer.

There will be some who say that we should leave this to parents. That would be great if it worked, but we already know tanning bed use is prevalent among teenage girls. Today, minors in Oregon can access indoor tanning devices as long as they have a one-time parental consent. As a parent of a teenager, I know how persuasive and risk-taking they can be. My hope is to provide the same protection as we do for smoking. Just as with tobacco, parental consent shouldn't override evidence of a clear cancer risk from UV exposure.

In closing, I would like to thank the House Health Committee for their unanimous support of this bill due to their recognition that the health risks were too great to ignore and I urge you to follow their lead.

Sincerely,

Brian Druker
Brian J. Druker, MD