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My name is Ryan Day and I am the Director of Advocacy & Government Affairs for the March of Dimes. Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony today.

The March of Dimes was founded to fight polio and fund the research that ultimately produced vaccines which eliminated the disease in the U.S. and almost every other nation on earth. Over the past decades, the United States has seen the virtual elimination of many diseases, largely due to the development and effective administration of vaccines. Public awareness about the dangers of these diseases and the benefit of vaccines was key to their elimination.

Tragically, memories of serious illnesses have faded, and a widely cited but universally discredited study planted the seeds of doubt and fear among some. Taken together, we find that immunization rates have dropped, and in some communities herd immunity no longer protects our most vulnerable, the young, the old, and those whose immune systems are compromised.

I urge you to vote against Senate Bill 580. The policy put forward in this bill is designed to guide parents toward minimizing the number of vaccinations that their child receives. It forces medical providers to explain exemptions to mandatory vaccinations for public schools, portraying vaccinations as optional, further lowering vaccination rates.

I also urge you to vote against Senate Bill 869. Informed consent is already the standard of practice for medical professionals when administering vaccines, so in practical terms this bill would not accomplish anything. However, this language will be used as a red herring by vaccine skeptics. They will point to this law and say “why would medical professionals be required by law to gain informed consent if vaccines are safe.”

I strongly urge you to oppose Senate Bill 914. This bill would bar employers from requiring vaccinations as a condition of employment. Nothing would be able to prevent unvaccinated staff working on a pediatric oncology ward or in a NICU. Staff in nursing care facilities could expose their patients to a variety of diseases. The entire rationale for mandatory school vaccines is undermined if staff are not held to the same standard. These diseases can kill or maim otherwise healthy people, but SB 914 would chip away at our ability to protect our most vulnerable citizens, babies, the sick, and the elderly.

As you will hear many times today, for vaccines to be effective it is crucial that we have extremely high rates of vaccination among the population. The more that we chip away at policies that promote vaccination, the more outbreaks we will see of vaccine preventable diseases. What will that look like? The March of Dimes has antique iron lungs in our National office if you'd like to see.