

March 28, 2017

Oregon State Legislature
Senate Committee on Health Care
900 Court St. NE
Salem Oregon 97301

Re: *Senate Bill 914 – Prohibiting immunizations as a condition of employment*

Dear Chair Monnes Anderson and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Oregon's 62 hospitals and health systems, and the patients they serve, the Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health Systems appreciates the opportunity to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 914 which would prohibit employers from requiring immunizations as a condition of employment unless required by federal law.

Hospitals and health care workers have a responsibility to prevent the spread of infection and avoid causing harm to patients and communities. Requiring immunizations ensures patient safety and protects vulnerable populations such as infants, older adults and those living with weakened immune systems. Oregon hospitals have made significant efforts to bolster immunization rates by providing barrier-free access to vaccinations and incentivizing them for health care workers.

Immunizations are an important tool for communicable disease control and are vital for preventing influenza epidemics. This winter Oregon was hit with one of the worst influenza seasons on record. In the Portland metro area alone over 1,000 people were hospitalized for influenza, surpassing the 2014 record when 810 were hospitalized. Many hospitals across the state were at full capacity and patients and their families faced extended wait times.

Since 2009, Oregon hospitals have been required to report health care worker influenza vaccination rates to the Oregon Health Authority. By prohibiting mandated immunizations in Oregon labor law code, this bill may prevent hospitals from collecting this required reporting information. The Healthy People 2020 goal for influenza vaccination among health care workers is 90 percent. In 2015-16, 78 percent of hospitals health care workers, 68 percent of ambulatory surgery center health care workers and 63 percent of skilled nursing facility workers were immunized for influenza. SB 914 would create additional barriers in achieving this important prevention goal.

Vulnerable Oregonians can't afford another record flu season or meningitis outbreak. SB 914 puts Oregon hospitals and communities at risk for infectious disease outbreaks and epidemics.

Thank you for your consideration.

Andi Easton
Associate Vice President of Government Affairs and Advocacy
Oregon Association of Hospitals and Health systems.