



Testimony in Opposition to Senate Bill 687

April 5, 2017

Senate Human Services Committee

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Oregon Nurses Association

Chair Gelser and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Oregon Nurses Association in opposition to Senate Bill 687 which would expressly exclude not vaccinating a child from the definition of abuse.

The Oregon Nurses Association is Oregon's oldest and largest nursing union and professional association and is proud to represent nearly 15,000 registered nurses, advanced practice nurses and nursing students in Oregon. Oregon nurses make up the largest segment of Oregon's health care work force, and work in nearly every health care setting, from large hospitals to small local clinics, from corrections to school-based health centers and in community-based public health.

ONA members support policies that work to promote wellness and prevent the spread of disease. In explicitly defining that not immunizing a child is *not* abuse, Senate Bill 687 undermines the work the state has done to continue to increase Oregon's vaccination rates and ultimately works against the goal we are trying to achieve in better public health outcomes.

Oregon ranks among the very lowest in immunizations nationwide.¹ Of children younger than 3 years old, fewer than 90 percent have received even a single dose of the MMR (mumps, measles, and rubella) vaccine, and only 66.6 percent have completed all the recommended immunizations.² Our state's low immunization rates affect all ages of our youth, leaving many Oregonians vulnerable to a multitude of diseases and the recent measles outbreak in infants and young children demonstrates what a serious public health and safety concern Oregon's low vaccination level is.

We shouldn't work to define vaccinations as a form of abuse particularly when evidence-based studies continue to show that vaccines do not cause diseases, they prevent them.³ The diseases that vaccinations prevent are not benign childhood illnesses. They are diseases that present serious complications and can even be fatal. As you consider the implications of Oregon's low vaccination rates, please consider the invaluable health safeguards vaccinations have on those who have compromised immune systems, infants, and the elderly.

Vaccinations are required for children to attend public and private schools, preschools, child care facilities, and Head Start programs in Oregon unless there is a valid exemption. Currently Oregon statute only defines child abuse as *not* including reasonable discipline. We do not need further codify in statute what the definition of abuse does not include.

Oregon has a duty to the public health and safety of our state to ensure that children receive effective vaccinations and that we limit barriers and exemptions to children receiving immunizations. We should not be flippant about parents deciding not to vaccinate their children. We encourage you to look for more comprehensive and robust strategies to limit the spread of disease and educate the public on the effectiveness of vaccines then the proposal outlined in SB 687.

¹ <http://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/2015-annual-report/measure/Immunize/state/ALL>

² <http://public.health.oregon.gov/PreventionWellness/VaccinesImmunization/Documents/RatesNISOregon.pdf>

³ <https://public.health.oregon.gov/PreventionWellness/VaccinesImmunization/VaccineSafety/Pages/VaxFacts.aspx>