

TO Oregon State Legislature, Senate Committee on Health Care

Re: Support for HB 3063

Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

I am Kristina Haley, DO, MCR, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Pediatric Hematology/Oncology at Oregon Health & Sciences in Portland, writing to urge your support of HB 3063, which seeks to remove the non-medical vaccine exemption from Oregon law.

In my clinical work, I take care of children from birth through adolescence and often young adulthood who have a variety of blood disorders who are from all regions of Oregon. As a result of their blood disorders or, more often, as a result of the medication that they must take, their immune systems do not work effectively. Their immune dysfunctions put them at risk for serious, life-limiting, and life-threatening infections. When I prescribe a medication that suppresses or impairs the immune system, I am balancing the increased risk of infections with the benefit of disease control. This risk/benefit analysis is one I perform carefully and thoughtfully as placing a child at risk for infection is not something I do lightly. However, with access to medical care, antibiotics, and the protection of vaccines, I typically can determine that the risk of infection is low and the benefits of disease control is high. The measles outbreak in Clark County has forced me to re-evaluate this risk/benefit ratio as the assumption that my patient will be protected from vaccine preventable diseases due to herd immunity is no longer valid. The measles outbreak is forcing me to think for some of my patients: is it really safe to get their disease under control with this immune suppressing medication with the current infectious risks in our community? Unfortunately, most of the time I do not have the luxury of choosing not to start the immune suppressing medication as the diseases I treat progress quickly to life-limiting or life-threatening without treatment.

Over the last few weeks in my clinic while seeing patients who have been on immune suppressing medications for years or less, I have been thinking about the measles a lot. Many of the patients I treat have a condition where their immune systems attack blood cells, causing severe bleeding symptoms or severe anemia requiring transfusions. The way we treat this is to knock down the immune system so that it leaves the patient's blood cells alone. Due to the underlying diseases and the treatments, many have not been able to receive all of the normal childhood vaccines. And, their medications make them more susceptible to infections and severe complications of infections. They are completely dependent on the community receiving appropriate vaccinations to keep the rates of vaccine-preventable diseases at a minimum – to provide herd immunity. At this time, we have discussed how to avoid contact with known measles exposures, what to do in the event of an accidental exposure, and how we will treat her if she is exposed. This is not a risk that we should have to take-into-account with their treatment as there are safe, effective, proven ways to prevent diseases like measles – with vaccines.

As a pediatric hematologist/oncologist, I spend a lot of time discussing risks and benefits. Many of the medications I prescribe bring with them significant side effects and risks. I feel comfortable in this practice of weighing risks and benefits of medical interventions. There is

nothing I feel more confident with regard to benefits outweighing any risks than with vaccines. Prior to vaccination, parents are provided with scientifically sound information regarding the risks and benefits of each individual vaccines. Vaccines do not cause autism. Vaccines save lives.

The measles outbreak should serve as an incredible warning to us all – one that is imperative to heed. At this time, over 61 individuals have contracted measles, which is a disease that none of us should ever see. It has potentially devastating effects. And, it is completely preventable. The measles outbreak is telling us that the immunity in our community is at an unsafe level, putting vulnerable populations like the children I care for at incredible risk. It is unbelievable to me that we can save a child from a rare and aggressive blood disorder and they may still die of diseases that are easily preventable with vaccination.

I ask the committee to protect children's lives. Please support HB 3063.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kristina Haley". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Kristina Haley, DO, MCR