



Date: February 28, 2019
To: House Committee on Health Care, Chair Salinas and Members
From: Laurie Wimmer, OEA Government Relations
RE: *HB 3063 [Vaccination Bill]*

On behalf of OEA's 45,000 members, it is my honor to testify in support of HB 3063, a bipartisan bill to help keep schoolchildren safer. In fact, by narrowing the list of reasons parents could exempt their children from mandatory vaccinations, HB 3063 will keep everyone in our schools safer.

At this writing, the Pacific Northwest is currently coping with nearly 70 measles cases. Oregon has the highest rate of unvaccinated school children in the country – 7.5 percent. Though a 1998 study linking vaccines to autism has since been retracted, junk science promulgated on the Internet has confused many well-meaning people, leading to this public health emergency.

Just two months into 2019, U.S. cases of measles, for instance, already exceed all of those reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2017, and the number continues to climb. This threatens children and adults alike who have compromised immune systems and who may have to become prisoners in their own homes to avoid infection.

Oregon has required students to be immunized against typical diseases such as measles, mumps, and rubella since 1973. Those whose compromised immune system makes vaccinations contra-indicated have always been exempt. Until 2013, this law worked to ensure the right balance of individual and community health considerations. In recent years, however, the “anti-vaccination” movement has increased the number of students without these sometimes life-saving vaccines. Parents who opt not to protect their own children because of a misunderstanding of vaccine science have put whole communities at risk. It's time to admit that Oregon's six-year experiment allowing parents non-medical exemptions has been a failure.

Our schools deserve to be safe havens for all our children and staff. The “philosophical” exemption from this vital community health protocol stands in the way of that goal. Students who may contract these diseases will miss vital learning time. With our concern over student achievement, chronic absenteeism, and improving education attainment, Oregon schools and the students they serve should not have to cope with this completely avoidable crisis.

It's time to rejoin the majority of states whose medical-only exemption laws have led to nearly universal vaccination rates and low childhood disease incidence.

Thank you.