

I am submitting two testimonies, one as a parent and the other as a teacher. This is my testimony as a teacher:

Thank you Chair and Committee, My name is Sonja Grabel and I live in Beaverton. I have a master's degree in education and have been a public school teacher for the last 17 years. I'm here in opposition to HB 3063. As you probably have heard, teaching is a tough job. Of the 100,000 things that I worry and stress about each day, fear of spread of "vaccine preventable diseases" doesn't even make the list. In all my years of teaching, I had one student in my class with a "vaccine preventable disease." Ironically, she was fully vaccinated for it. Many years ago, there was a child in a neighboring class, who was immune-compromised. She had cancer. She was barely at school that year, not because they were afraid of "vaccine preventable diseases" being spread at school, but because she was too fragile to be exposed to any illnesses. Colds, noro viruses, strep, etc. . . All illnesses were dangerous to her, vaccines available or not. Sadly, she did pass a few years later, but from cancer, not a contagious illness.

However, in the classroom, we do face real threats every day! I'm scared, and it isn't of the measles. Every year, roughly half of my class has a chronic illness, disability, or developmental disorder. Several students with autism, several more with ADHD, allergies, asthma, anxiety, sensory processing disorders, and behavior disorders. Each year is a little worse than the last. My students are in danger. Not only is their own health in danger, but they are in danger from other students. Children with unaddressed needs are placed in regular education classrooms without sufficient support because our special education system is stretched to the breaking point by the increase in number and severity of students with special needs. I've had students throw books, pencils, and other objects around the room and run out of the classroom to other rooms to tear them apart. "Room clears" which I'd never even heard of my first 10 years of teaching, have become commonplace. These students who have severe behavior challenges and physically harm both adults and students are not barred from schools, even though they are often a direct threat. (I'm not saying they should be.) Meanwhile, this bill is proposing to unnecessarily remove healthy, well-behaved students from school. As a teacher, I have a huge problem with that. I believe all students have a right to an education. They should only be excluded when absolutely necessary. Our current practice of designing exclusion orders that keep the spread of disease at bay while disrupting as few students as possible is sensible and prudent. I see zero benefit in excluding all children missing even just one dose of a vaccine.

Last year, I received suicide-prevention training at school. I teach kindergarten. Apparently, childhood suicide is on the rise. According to the OHA, suicide is the second leading cause of death for ages 10-24. This sounds like a true emergency! One thing we learned, and is outlined in the OHA 2016-2020 Youth Suicide Intervention and Prevention plan is that social isolation is a contributing factor to suicides. One of the recommendations is to make sure children have a solid peer and community network. Schools are actually listed as a benefitting factor. Schools. We know from a case in Washington, that excluding kids from school raises suicide risk. Imagine if all exemption-holding students are suddenly kicked out of school, abruptly losing peer connections and school supports, likely facing public embarrassment and bullying. How many of these kids will commit suicide? Is anyone looking at the data on this? Given that suicide is the #2 cause of death in teens in Oregon and that Oregon has a higher suicide rate than most of the country, I can't help but assume there will be at least some suicides as a result. Given that we haven't had a death from measles – or even a case of measles spread in schools - in many years, I'm also going to hazard a guess that more children will die by suicide if this bill is implemented than could possibly be saved by this bill. So, I ask you, will this bill really save lives? Or will it result in more suicides?

If you want to further address the spread of illness at school, though, I have some ideas for you that will actually be effective. Install hand-washing stations in school cafeterias so children actually wash hands before eating. Encourage all students to wash hands upon arriving at school and at home. When I started this practice, there was a noticeable drop in illnesses. Align school start times with best practices so children can get enough rest, which is essential for supporting the immune system. Finally, support reasonable absence policies at school and work so children and adults alike can stay home when ill. These simple changes would likely improve health far more than this bill could ever do. Let's stop wasting our precious resources by addressing a non-issue. We have real problems in childhood health and education right now. Teachers are leaving the profession, stressed out and burnt out from the enormous pressure and explosion in behavior problems we now have a childhood chronic illness and disability rate of about 54%! This is our health crisis. Let's address this. If you are really concerned about increasing vaccination rates, push the CDC and HHS to address the safety concerns that these parents have presented instead of pretending they don't exist. Demand the return of the individual measles, mumps, and rubella vaccines, which would automatically increase uptake. Making a child's right to an education contingent upon their acceptance of dozens of doses of liability-free pharmaceutical product is a violation of their rights and unethical.

Let's focus on TODAY's health crisis and not get swept up in fear over the health crisis of our grandparents.