

To the House Committee on Healthcare:

I am writing asking you to oppose House Bill 3063, which removes existing exemptions to vaccination for Oregon children to access education and childcare.

Keeping our children safe and healthy is a goal that everyone shares, and I understand that the sponsors of this bill are acting from a desire to help children. Unfortunately, this bill, by removing the important freedom of parents to decide on this issue, would hurt many Oregon children by cutting them off from their opportunity to gain an education. One of the children affected would be my five year old niece.

My niece lives in House District 44. She has an extremely rare (1 in 4,000) genetic disease that causes tumors, seizures, and for some sufferers, including my niece, developmental delays. She has also experienced severe reactions to common illnesses. Her parents have been advised by one of their doctors (an MD) that she should not be vaccinated. Despite her serious illness, it is doubtful that she would be able to receive a medical exemption under current guidelines in Oregon.

She is currently thriving in an online charter school, and receiving multiple therapy services due to her special needs. As just one example, her excellent speech therapist recently taught her to say "yes." It is appalling to me to realize that she could immediately be cut off from these much-needed educational services if this one-size-fits-all bill passes. She should not be discriminated against in receiving an education because she has a serious, life-impacting illness that has led her parents, in consultation with their doctor, to choose to do what is right for her individual health needs and decline vaccination.

My niece's case is not an isolated instance. Parents know the individual considerations affecting their own children, they want what is best for their own children, and their freedom to choose, for many compelling reasons, should be respected.

It may seem confusing that parents would refuse vaccinations that could protect their children against illness. However, there are good reasons why people make this choice. Some do not vaccinate due to deeply held religious or philosophical beliefs. As just one example, it is not widely known that some vaccines on the CDC schedule, such as the MMR and the chickenpox vaccine, were created with cells from humans that were aborted. Many people who object to abortion on religious grounds refuse these vaccines. It would be wrong to force these people to violate their consciences and vaccinate, or else be discriminated against due to their religious beliefs and have their children denied an education. This bill would prevent these children from accessing an education in any school - public, private, charter, or online.

Other families opt-out of vaccination due to serious health concerns, either for an individual child, or because of their family health history. Some parents have had children experience serious reactions to vaccines, or have a family history of illness that puts their children at greater risk. For example, the CDC now recommends that children who have a parent or sibling with a history of immune system problems should not receive the MMR vaccine.

In such cases, it might seem as though it would be simple for a child to receive a medical exemption - the only kind of exemption allowed for in this bill that would permit a child to remain in school. However, this is not simple at all. One might assume that a medical exception might be granted by visiting a doctor and getting a "prescription," as it were, that exempts the patient

from vaccines. This is not the case. In Oregon, any exception must be approved by the Oregon Health Authority, and is only granted for a very few pre-approved conditions, or an extremely severe reaction to a specific vaccine. This leaves behind many children that should be exempted on medical grounds, such as my niece.

Despite the impact on children like my niece who would be negatively affected by this troubling bill, concern for children who might be harmed by diseases such as measles might influence you to consider supporting this bill in order to keep unvaccinated children out of schools. There has recently been a lot of media attention on measles. However, alarm about measles and the threat posed by the unvaccinated is misplaced.

There has been only one death from the measles in the entire United States between 2003 and the present day. By way of perspective, an average of 44 Americans die every year due to being struck by lightning; Americans are far, far more likely to die being attacked by a bear or a dog than from the measles! The current media attention on measles would lead one to believe that the danger posed by this disease is much greater than is actually the case.

Despite the current law allowing for exemptions, Oregon students are vaccinated at very high rates, guaranteeing that any outbreak of measles will be short-lived and affect relatively few. Our present system - parents making decisions in consultation with their family doctors, without politicians needing to be involved - is working well.

Please oppose this bill. Don't harm children by discriminating against those that do not vaccinate on basis of disability or on basis of religion by depriving them of their right to an education, due to media focus on a disease that poses little threat.

Respectfully,  
Alberta Hudlow