

March 15, 2025

Senate Committee On Health Care
Oregon State Senate
900 Court St. NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Chair Patterson and Members of the Committee,

My name is Andrea Bateman and I am a pediatrician writing to you today in support of Senate Bill 42 and the -1 amendment. Vaccines prevent mass outbreaks, eradicate diseases, and ultimately save lives. But right now, access to vaccines is at risk for many across our state.

As a physician with nearly 30 years of experience, I have had the privilege of witnessing the transformative power of vaccines in preventing disease and saving lives. Thanks to widespread vaccination efforts, devastating childhood illnesses such as measles, polio, and haemophilus influenzae—once responsible for millions of deaths—have been virtually eliminated in the United States. However, my experiences caring for children affected by vaccine-preventable diseases before vaccines became widely available have left a lasting impression on me, underscoring the urgent need for continued vaccine funding and accessibility.

Many think of chickenpox as a harmless childhood illness, but during my training, I saw firsthand the severe complications it could cause. One case that stands out was an eight-year-old girl whose entire body, including her eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and genitalia, was covered in painful lesions. She was unable to eat and suffered immensely. Such cases were not unusual before the chickenpox vaccine was introduced, highlighting how crucial vaccination is in preventing unnecessary suffering.

Another disease that illustrates the importance of vaccines is meningococcal disease. This bacterial infection can progress rapidly, sometimes leading to death within 24 hours. During my residency in the late 1990s, an epidemic of meningococcal disease in the Pacific Northwest led to a steady influx of critically ill children in our hospital. Many developed life-threatening complications such as sepsis, kidney failure, and uncontrolled blood clotting. Some lost fingers, toes, and even limbs despite aggressive treatment, and tragically, some did not survive. Today, we have two vaccines targeting different strains of this disease, and a new vaccine that covers

all strains was set to be discussed at this year's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) meeting—only for that discussion to be indefinitely postponed. Ensuring funding and support for such vaccines is essential to preventing future outbreaks.

Another success story is the HPV vaccine, which has the potential to nearly eliminate cervical and oral cancers caused by human papillomavirus. Initially, misinformation led to slow uptake of this vaccine, but studies now confirm its extraordinary effectiveness. I will never forget a medical assistant I worked with in Alaska who, at just 23 years old, was undergoing radiation treatment for cervical cancer. She had only ever had one sexual partner—her husband. She had not been vaccinated. In 2025, no woman should have to die from a disease that is entirely preventable.

Of course I would be remiss if I didn't mention measles. I have never seen a case of measles in my career, nor have any of my colleagues. The current vaccination rate in Oregon is a dismal 85.9%, well below the 92% needed to assure the herd immunity that prevents widespread outbreaks and protects the vulnerable among us. I'm terrified about what will happen if this incredibly contagious disease begins to spread in Oregon communities.

Oregon's Vaccine Access Program (VAP) is absolutely critical to the health of Oregonians, and right now it is at risk of being significantly underfunded. This kind of massive reduction – currently estimated to be 65-70% of enrolled clinics – will threaten vaccine access statewide and particularly for low-income populations, rural communities, and historically marginalized groups.

Vaccines save lives. They are among the safest, most thoroughly studied, and most effective medical advancements in history. Because of vaccines, millions of children have grown up to be healthy, productive adults. I urge you to do everything in your power to protect our children and communities by advocating for and securing funding for vaccination programs.

Thank you for your time and commitment to public health.

Please take action to protect the health of Oregonians.

Vote yes on Senate Bill 42 and the -1 amendment.

Thank you,

Andrea Bateman, MD

Oregon Pediatric Society Board Member