

Feb 8, 2026

To the Oregon State Senate Committee on Health Care:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on SB 1598. I am a disabled single mother in her 50's with two teenagers, living in SE Portland. I live with severe complications from Long COVID, which I believe might have been avoided had I been able to receive COVID boosters as often as I needed them.

I'd like to tell you a little more about the barriers I have faced to timely COVID boosters, even here in a "blue state."

Since 2016 I have lived with a rare form of non-cancerous brain tumor that has resulted in debilitating neurological symptoms. Over the years I've learned to mitigate the symptoms somewhat with lifestyle modifications and to avoid triggers that make the symptoms worse, one of which is seasonal viral infections. When the COVID pandemic came along I considered myself high-risk and took precautions accordingly. Besides masking and distancing, I got vaccines for myself and my kids literally on the first day appointments became available.

From March 2021 through September 2022 I got every COVID shot made available to me, which turned out to be about every 6 months. In December 2022 I came down with my first COVID breakthrough infection, which took me three months to get over, but I thankfully did get over it.

I was not so lucky with my second and third round of COVID, and I believe the difference was being forced onto a once-per-year COVID booster schedule.

As summer 2023 approached, with the expected COVID summer surge, I tried to get another 6-month booster and was repeatedly told that I wasn't old enough and didn't have a qualifying medical condition. I tried again as the start of the school year approached and was told the same thing.

In September 2023 I was monitoring the scheduling apps for several different pharmacies waiting for the first available appointment for my annual COVID shot – and came down with my second COVID infection before being able to make the appointment. From this point on my COVID symptoms became permanent.

I finally got my 2023 annual COVID shot in December 2023. As summer 2024 approached, with what would turn out to be a record-breaking surge, I tried again to get a six-month booster, arguing that since I already had Long COVID I should be considered an immune-compromised person. Again no pharmacy took me seriously, and my then-inadequate medical team was no help.

I got my third COVID infection in July 2024, and my Long COVID only got worse. I got my next annual shot in September 2024, too late for it to do me much good. I finally caught a break later in fall 2024, when I found a new primary doctor who took Long COVID seriously and referred me to an excellent pulmonologist. I learned I had left basilar atelectasis (collapsed alveoli in one of the lobes of my left lung) and was eventually diagnosed with ME/CFS (chronic fatigue syndrome).

By spring of 2025 I was trying again for a six-month COVID booster, this time with documents in hand from my pulmonologist attesting that I needed it. What came next felt like something out of Franz Kafka. Walgreens refused to accept my doctor's prescription, saying it didn't contain enough information. When my doctor then provided more information Walgreens still refused to make the appointment, saying "this is a letter, we cannot accept a letter, it needs to be in the form of a prescription."

I finally got an appointment by disregarding the documentation from my doctor and self-identifying as immune-compromised at a pharmacy where they didn't know me. I got my 6-month booster in March 2025, and fortunately made it through the summer without a new COVID infection.

In August 2025 I was dreading the start of the new school year and the new federal guidelines expected for September (under which I might have been deemed "not sick enough" for even an annual COVID shot, and the kids might have needed to qualify as high-risk in their own right). I faced a difficult choice – try to get the kids and myself another dose of the 2024-25 shot, which might not protect against the latest variants; or roll the dice and wait for the 2025-26 shot, which we might be barred from getting at all.

I opted to get us all COVID shots in late August, and managed to do it after another round of checking every pharmacy. I had to pay for the kids' shots out-of-pocket at CVS, almost \$400 total, not a small thing for a disabled single mother. (I eventually got the kids' Kaiser insurance to reimburse me, relying on the technicality that Kaiser's stocks of the 2024-25 vaccine were out at the time, and citing the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines that children "whose household contacts are at high risk for severe COVID-19" should get the shot. Another enormous hassle!)

Since I still wasn't protected against the new LP.8.1 variant, I sought another COVID shot in December 2025, and once again found myself playing a game of "musical pharmacies." Again I got the shot by identifying myself as immune-compromised. (It remains unclear how well my complex of rare and novel chronic conditions fits that definition under former or current CDC guidelines.) The good news is that since I've been back on a schedule of 6-month boosters, **I have not gotten any new COVID infections!** The bad news is that I can't count on my current level of vaccine access continuing into the future, under our current anti-scientific climate in the US.

These days I live every day with debilitating fatigue and breathlessness, along with my pre-existing dizziness and brain fog that have become worse with Long COVID. I struggle on a daily basis to take care of my kids and myself. The last thing I need is to jump through complicated bureaucratic hoops just to get the vaccines that keep my condition from getting worse. I am already mostly house-bound. Another round of COVID could leave me bedridden, or worse.

I urge the Oregon Legislature to ensure immunization recommendations are based on science and that vaccines are as widely available as possible to the people who want and urgently need them. Passing SB 1598 would be a good start, but Oregon needs to do even better than the federal standards as they existed in June 2025. At a minimum, Long COVID needs to be included in the list of conditions qualifying a person for 6-month COVID boosters, but my story illustrates that even that is not enough. Adding neurological conditions to the list might have saved me from developing Long COVID in the first place. Ultimately I believe annual AND 6-month COVID boosters should be available, and fully covered by insurance, for all who want them without restriction.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on SB 1598.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Juergens