

Submitter:

J R

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

Senate Committee On Health Care

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

SB1598

I am offering my lived experience with COVID and vaccine access to highlight gaps in our immunization system and to demonstrate the need for consistent, science-based policy.

In the fall, I encountered significant barriers when attempting to access a COVID vaccine. Local pharmacists were often unclear about eligibility requirements and hesitant to vaccinate me due to my age, despite my chronic illness placing me at higher risk. Because my illness is invisible, I faced heightened scrutiny and delays, even though I had previously been able to receive the vaccine without issue. Recent policy changes and inconsistent guidance created confusion at the point of care, ultimately limiting timely access to immunization.

In early 2021, not long after the vaccines first became available in Oregon, I contracted COVID and nearly died. At the height of the pandemic, I was unable to access appropriate treatment and had to survive a life-threatening illness with minimal support because of similar circumstances to what I experienced this past fall. Years later, I continue to live with long COVID while processing the lasting physical and psychological impacts of that experience. Had I been able to get a vaccine sooner, I believe that would've changed the outcome of my narrative.

My experience demonstrates why immunization access must be guided by evidence-based public health policy rather than ambiguity or discretionary interpretation. As a state, Oregon must remain proactive in preventing disease—not only COVID, but also other vaccine-preventable illnesses such as measles, which are currently on the rise.

Thank you for considering my testimony as you evaluate and shape immunization policy.