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On Behalf Of:
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Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1598

In September 2025, I led almost 100 Oregonians into Vancouver, where a pharmacist assured us that in the great state of Washington, everyone had access to COVID vaccines, even us refugees from Oregon. Plenty of states had created standing orders like Washington so their communities could protect themselves. But OHA and the Governor's office were hamstrung from doing the same.

It might not seem like a big deal to most folks to wait a month for a vaccine, but September was the start of school, of flu season, and immunocompromised folks needed those vaccines because we're precisely the people that end up with severe outcomes. I have worked with thousands of people trying to get vaccinated over the last 5 years, and heard about every roadblock people encountered in this pursuit.

As you've heard today, when OHA offered the guideline that seniors over 65 qualified for the updated COVID vaccine, pharmacists continued to ask for proof of additional underlying conditions, arguing over which conditions qualified, or requiring a prescription. We struggle to get PCPs, much less PCP appointments in a timely manner because of a statewide shortage. Chronically ill folks struggle to pay for those visits, time off work, childcare, and travel. We've already had those conversations about vaccines w our physician. Getting prescriptions covered and filled is a time consuming and emotionally draining process. Chair Patterson and Vice Chair Hayden, you asked what problem this bill solves, it solves two. We need crystal clear guidelines for pharmacies, insurance, and healthcare providers to prevent these roadblocks of WHO can get these vaccines and absolute assurance insurance covers it. We are still getting dramatic pushback from insurance companies, you have NO idea how hard it is to get that coverage in practice, and all of that extra work and anxiety is just so unnecessary and cruel.

Last month, a young woman approached me at an event to explain she was sure I'd saved her life. She was a classroom teacher, had already had long COVID, and despite masking, had gotten it again. But because she had gotten her COVID vaccine 2 weeks previously at my clinic in Vancouver, and after a rough few weeks, she had recovered and her long COVID wasn't worse.

Senator Lithicum, if you want to consult your physician before getting a vaccine, who's stopping ya? Not this bill. Also, by in large, physicians want you to get vaccinated. Opposing this bill means opposing medical freedom. I encourage you to enshrine the state's ability to make vaccine access easier for everyone by passing this bill. Some of us can't wait.

