

Date: February 24, 2026
To: Senate Committee on Healthcare
From: Debra Koutnik, MD, FAAP
Subject: Support for SB 1598

As a pediatrician for 34 years who has provided healthcare in Southern Oregon since 1994, I urge you to pass SB 1598.

I was surprised to see so many letters opposing this legislation. But reading them, I see that they totally misunderstand this legislation. They are claiming this somehow infringes on their “medical freedom” when in fact it does just the opposite. There is nothing in SB 1598 that forces individuals to obtain any particular healthcare. Instead, it protects Oregonians opportunity to choose optimal preventive healthcare.

One victory in the original Affordable Care Act was to require insurance companies to cover a full complement of preventive healthcare, including vaccinations, metabolic screening, cancer screening, childhood developmental screening, and mental health care coverage on parity with physical healthcare. Prior to that, many private insurances refused coverage for these health promoting and life saving medical services.

As a physician, I have been shocked by the chaos created by the current federal administration. The Director of Health and Human Services (HHS) has engaged in outrageous ideologically based and sweeping changes that undermine decades of accountability, reliability, and evidence based practice in American Public Health.

There are many examples of the harms being caused by this Administration, but I will focus on their vaccine policy. Director Kennedy dismissed the entire panel of highly qualified members of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) and replaced these experts with a collection of anti-vaccine ideologues. In the past, ACIP Meetings consisted of very detailed presentations of data, a thorough discussion of how any decision would impact all potential stakeholders, including an equity lens to consider how the most vulnerable Americans could be impacted. Kennedy’s Committee did NONE of these things before making disruptive, arbitrary, non-evidence based decisions. Their lack of sound data and consideration of multiple perspectives in making decisions that negatively impact Americans was truly shocking.

For example, in December 2025, Kennedy’s Committee voted to discontinue the recommendation for universal Hepatitis B vaccination at birth. This Committee ignored decades of research to determine the optimal vaccine timing to minimize illness and deaths from chronic Hepatitis B infection.

Universal Hepatitis B vaccination has been an overwhelming success. Prior to this practice, 18,000 American children per year became infected with Hepatitis B prior to age 10, and half of these children became infected at birth. Children infected early in life have a much higher rate of converting to chronic Hepatitis B, which kills 25% of the infected children. Universal Hep B vaccination at birth decreased childhood infections by 99% and prevented 90,000 deaths over the past decade.

This is only one example of many where the current administration has increased the risk of disability and death to Americans. SB 1598 will protect Oregon families from this chaos by ensuring that all patients can have access to evidence based, lifesaving public health interventions not limited and disrupted by the capricious whims and shifting federal guidance from unqualified ideologues. **Vote yes on SB 1598 to preserve Oregonians health.**

Debra Koutnik, MD, Fellow of the American Academy of Pediatrics