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On Behalf Of:
Committee: House Committee On Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1598

My name is Jeessoo Suh, and I am a high school student in Beaverton, Oregon. I'm here today to ask you for your support on Senate Bill 1598 because protecting vaccine access means protecting the futures of young people like me and my peers.

I started middle school during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and what I remember most from the experience isn't the strangeness of the classroom becoming a Zoom meeting, but what it was like to go back. At a time where infection rates were high and vaccines were still being rolled out, I had friends scared about leaving remote learning because they were living with immunocompromised relatives, one of our classmates was hospitalized for days after a COVID infection— there was a feeling of risk about just showing up to receive our education. With recent disruptions to vaccine access, we've had this feeling return. Oregon just declared an outbreak of measles amidst declining immunization rates, and we know that schools can be infectious hotspots for dangerous disease. Safety and learning shouldn't be an either/or choice, but when vaccine access isn't supported, that is what it becomes.

Changes around vaccine recommendations at the federal level are already causing uncertainty about access. The CDC says vaccines like those against HPV and RSV can cost over 300 dollars without insurance, and this is out of reach for far too many families. Senate Bill 1598 preserves people's right to choose what is most safe and healthy for themselves and their communities by preventing these kinds of barriers. I urge your support for this measure not only to protect lives right now, but for the futures of young Oregonians.