

2/23/2019

TO Oregon State Legislature, Senate Committee on Health Care

Re: Support for HB 3063

Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

I am Emily Puterbaugh, MD, from Portland OR, writing to urge your support of HB 3063, which seeks to remove the non-medical vaccine exemption from Oregon law.

This measles outbreak is striking fear into everyone. Pediatricians have been hearing it on a daily basis from parents in the phone calls, clinic visits, and news. I understand. I have learned to fear many things over 11,000 hours inside a children's hospital and since, in my six years as a general pediatrician and mom.

I fear car accidents and drownings but also preventable illnesses like flu and whooping cough. I have cared for children with the flu and secondary infections like pneumonia and meningitis. I have cared for a baby with whooping cough who spent months on heart lung bypass machines in the ICU.

I fear measles. I have not seen measles personally, and I don't want to. Children are the most vulnerable to measles and its complications like pneumonia or brain swelling or death. It is one of the few truly airborne illnesses with the ability to stay in the air for up to two hours so it can spread quickly and easily.

I fear for our community. 7.5% of kindergarteners in Oregon are not fully vaccinated. We need herd immunity (a vaccination rate of at least 95%) to prevent the spread of disease and our current situation is primed for the reemergence of vaccine preventable illnesses.

What I fear most of all is that we as a medical community cannot fix this problem independently. People come into my office believing what they have read on the internet, be it pro- or anti-vaccine. Sure, there are families that are receptive to an expert opinion. Sadly though, enough families just do not believe in vaccine science. We need help in order to achieve a 95% vaccination rate and with it, herd immunity.

It is time for lawmakers to remove non-medical exemptions from public school immunization requirements. We need to protect those among us who cannot be vaccinated: babies too young to be vaccinated, cancer survivors, and those of us with compromised immune systems. In the same way that drunk-driving is illegal so as to protect the rest of us, we owe it to the vulnerable to protect them in our community and schools. This approach does work.

The three states that have no personal exemptions--California, Mississippi and West Virginia--have some of the best immunization rates in the country. California went from a 92.8% kindergarten vaccination rate to above 95.1% after eliminating nonmedical

exemptions. That is what we need here in Oregon, too. If the medical community cannot make this happen, then we need the law to do it.

I took an oath the day I started medical school to first do no harm. Each day I try to follow that oath and conquer the fears I am presented, to do my best to help the small humans in my care. I try to remember, too, that there is really nothing to fear but fear itself. And measles. And spiders. And snowstorms in Portland.

I ask the committee to protect children's lives. Please support HB 3063.

Thank you,

Emily Puterbaugh, MD, FAAP