

I am Dr. Jimmy Unger, a Pediatrician practicing in Portland, testifying, in support of HB 3063.

I was practicing in Texas in 1989 when there was a measles outbreak that resulted in more than 3200 cases and 10 deaths. I have vivid memories of how sick those children were – how sad to see so many children so affected by a preventable disease.

For the last 6 years, I have practiced in Portland metro area, where, in recent weeks, we have had ~ 70 cases of measles. Almost all of these patients were unvaccinated children. Almost all of the unvaccinated children I see are children whose parent exercise the personal/philosophical exemption. During this most recent measles outbreak, I have seen the psychological toll that the outbreak has had on our community: families unwilling to pursue “normal” outings for fear of contracting potentially fatal disease, unnecessary and repeated acute care visits which often led to avoidable testing and even more anxiety.

I have invested a lot of time and energy in the last 35 years encouraging parents to vaccinate their children - - educating them about both the tremendous benefits and slight side effects. Vaccine-hesitant parents and I share the same passion for children’s health. Our opinions diverge on the importance and validity of the decades of evidence. Valid science tells us that vaccines save lives with minimal adverse side effects. Public health historians and experts tell us that nothing, with the possible exception of plumbing, has saved as many lives as vaccines.

What would passage of HB 3063 mean? Repealing the personal/philosophical exemption to immunization means that an individual’s right to leave their unprotected may be infringed upon. If the concept of herd immunity didn’t exist — one could argue that the right to leave your child unprotected from communicable diseases should reign supreme. The reality is that those choosing to use the exemption are jeopardizing public health. Society pays a price for individuals’ freedom to ignore good science, to leave their children unprotected and to jeopardize the health of others. There are many other examples of sound policy-makers and legislators siding with public health over individual rights: speed limits, indoor plumbing requirements, building codes, and bans on public smoking - - to name a few. I urge our Legislature to consider the abundant scientific evidence, to utilize their knowledge of the public health impact of our present exemption policy and to pass HB 3063.

Many thanks for your consideration.

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