

Testimony in support of HB 3063

OSNA works to support nurses practicing in the school setting in Oregon. As the health experts in the education setting, we teach about the importance of preventive care in the overall health and wellbeing of individual students, their families, and our school communities as a whole. An essential public health tool in decreasing rates of illness across our communities is vaccination for those who do not have a medical reason that prevents them from receiving this protection. The medical science is definitive about the impact of vaccination on reducing transmission rates of diseases, and reducing disease-related costs to society; it is far cheaper to prevent a disease than to treat it.

As educators, we approach this issue as nurses for **all** students. We recognize that families hold varying beliefs about the efficacy and permissibility of vaccination. We respect that families have the right to make choices for their children individually; however, when sending children into environments where close space and classroom objects are routinely shared, the necessity for communicable disease control through vaccination must also be recognized and respected.

As nurses, we aim to remove legitimate barriers to educational access and we have direct responsibility for making the school environment safe for those who are most medically fragile, some of whom cannot be immunized. Vaccines protect not only the individual who receives them, but also the individuals with whom they interact. Once a critical number of students and staff within a school community are vaccinated against common illnesses, the entire school population becomes less likely to become infected. Families of those students who are *unable* to receive vaccines due to a medical condition have no choice about protecting their child through immunization. When unvaccinated students enter the school environment, it places those already medically fragile students at significant, increased risk of being exposed to a vaccine-preventable disease. This increased chance that preventable diseases may then spread through the school can limit the medically fragile child's access to their education, potentially violating their civil rights and negatively impacting their educational outcomes.

As school nurses, we work to ensure that students are not prevented from accessing their education due to health reasons. It is imperative that the education setting be a safe and healthy place for everyone who attends each day, and given the close proximity of students for extended periods of class time, vaccinations are vital in preventing the unnecessary spread of disease. The education setting should be a place of academic integrity and respect for evidence-base in all curriculum, policy, and student-safety decision making. The scientific evidence in support of routine childhood immunization in the prevention of disease clearly indicates that requiring vaccinations for the school setting is a public health imperative. By improving vaccination rates we will reduce communicable disease transmission, ultimately reducing missed class time due to illness, and increasing the educational access and success of all students.

Respectfully Submitted,

Oregon School Nurse
OEA Member