

February 28, 2019

To: Oregon House Committee on Health Care

From: Jessica Fichtel

Re: Testimony in Support of House Bill 3063

Good afternoon. Chair Salinas and members of the committee,

For the record my name is Jessica Fichtel and I am here to urge your support of HB 3063, which seeks to remove the non-medical vaccine exemption from Oregon law. Thank you for taking the time to hear from me today.

As a former healthcare worker in both Oregon and Africa, and the mom of a son currently being treated for acute lymphoblastic leukemia at OHSU, I've seen first hand the devastating results of not vaccinating our children.

When Kai was diagnosed on May 2, 2016 our worst fears were realized. What has ensued over the past three years has been nothing short of a living hell. Kai has endured nearly three years of weekly and monthly chemotherapy, quarterly lumbar punctures and chemo in his spinal fluid, daily and weekly oral chemo and monthly steroid pulses, countless port accesses and numerous ER visits for fevers and simple things like a common cold, all because he is immunocompromised...and he's only five.

What my husband Rob and I have endured during this time, is the fear that our child may die. Now, with the measles outbreak in Clark County, we fear that those who are unvaccinated could expose Kai, and other kids who are immunocompromised like Kai, to an inordinate amount of risk. The thing that is so frustrating is that Kai is vaccinated. He is current on all of his immunizations, up to and through his treatment. But an exposure to the measles, or even the flu could kill our son.

The philosophical exemptions that are allowed in Oregon are beyond frustrating, and because measles is "exquisitely" contagious, we've been on lockdown. Kai stayed home from school for the entire month of January because his school confirmed that there were unvaccinated kids still attending. We wore masks every time we went out in public, which was very rare. Visits to the hospital for Kai brought severe anxiety due to the potential for exposure. Kai couldn't attend music lessons, or Kumon, or anything where there would be a mass of people for fear of Kai being exposed. We even had to call the on-call doctor to ask if we could/should attend a special event for a family member because of the risk of a measles exposure.

Both my husband and I work in the healthcare field, and are in areas of high risk daily. We are constantly vigilant of our risk, and fear that we might expose Kai accidentally. Recently, on February 15th, I sought treatment for sinus pain, after waiting for four weeks because I was afraid I would expose Kai. I went to urgent care at the Vancouver clinic in Salmon Creek, and the next night, was informed there was a measles exposure in that clinic. That night was filled with intense fear, and honestly anger. I called the OHSU Oncology on-call team and asked what should I do. Should I get a booster, should I stay in a hotel

for 21 days, could I care for my child after my exposure. The following Monday, February 18th, less than 72 hours after exposure, I went and got my third measles vaccination, just in case my titers were low. My husband can tell you that during those two days between knowledge of exposure and when I received my vaccination, I was a nervous wreck-fearful, crying, pacing, sleepless, and afraid I exposed our son.

I shouldn't fear seeking treatment because people REFUSE to vaccinate their children. I shouldn't have to keep my child out of school, or out of the public because he has cancer, because he is immunocompromised. One thing I wanted to share was that our son received his annual flu vaccine in October. On February 25th, Kai woke at 4 am with a very high fever. No prodrome, and no signs of any illness the night before. We raced him to the OHSU Doernbecher emergency room, and they have a protocol to get antibiotics on-board within an hour after arrival, to protect against sepsis. The ER doctor said even though Kai didn't exhibit symptoms of the flu, he wanted to test because of Kai's immune compromised status. The test came back positive. With all of our handwashing, and mask wearing, and clothes changing upon arrival home from anywhere, and all of our careful diligence, Kai still got the flu. The first thing our doctor asked was, is he vaccinated for the flu. Because he was vaccinated, they said that it would greatly assist him in fighting the infection. Between Monday and Thursday of this week, Kai received three separate hour-long infusions of antibiotics, two separate bolus infusions of hydration, 8 doses of Oseltamivir, had three port accesses and two blood cultures. Kai goes back into the clinic on Friday. All for the flu. Imagine if he were exposed to the measles.

This outbreak was preventable. Those who opt out of vaccinating their children are placing vulnerable members of our population, like my son, at great risk for exposure.

This bill does not take away a parent's rights to make decisions about their children's healthcare. It only requires that children be vaccinated in order to attend school to protect the health of other students, teachers, staff and our community. I want my immunosuppressed child to have every educational opportunity his peers do as he battles leukemia. He deserves that and much more for what he goes through each and every day.

I'm here for Kai. Please think of him and support HB 3063.

Thank you,

Jessica Fichtel MS