

April 24, 2019

Oregon State Legislature
Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Services
900 Court St. NE
Salem Oregon 97301

RE: Support for HB 3063

Dear Co-Chairs Beyer and Nosse,

My name is Jessica Fichtel and I am writing to urge your support of HB 3063, which seeks to remove the non-medical vaccine exemption from Oregon law.

My son Kai Bonneau is five, and would be here with me today, but because he has chemotherapy and a lumbar puncture, this Friday (April 26th2019) for his acute lymphoblastic leukemia, we have to be extra careful to not expose him to large crowds of people because of the risk he may get sick, and have his treatment delayed. Kai is nearing the end of his 3 plus years of treatment for leukemia, which is anticipated to be the first week of July.

Many things have frightened our family over the past three years. Fevers, ER visits, rashes, viral and bacterial infections and most recently the flu. We are diligent hand washers and mask wearers and we make sure to stay home if we are sick. My husband and I even rent hotel rooms when one of us is sick because of the possibility of infecting our son, resulting in yet another ER visit. We can and do limit exposure by doing the things science tell us to do to prevent the sharing of viruses etc. But with the recent measles outbreak, there is no way to plan for that, besides vaccinating your child and yourself. Our son Kai has had his first measles vaccination and is current on most others, but when he was diagnosed, all vaccinations (except the flu) had to stop because they could or would be life threatening. When the recent measles outbreak started in Clark County, it created a new level of fear for the safety of our son. We went on lockdown. Kai stayed home from school and public places for several months for fear that another exposure site would pop up, and he would be at risk.

Every day my husband and I wake up and face the crippling fear that Kai may die from his leukemia. We have no choice in the gap of Kai's vaccinations. We rely on our community for herd immunity to help get us through this nightmare. Everyday poses some new risk. A friend with a runny nose, a stranger's cough, walking through Costco in Portland...but for most parents, no thought is given to this. For our family, it is an obsession. Before I spoke to the senate last time, someone in the rotunda suggested that I was the reason my son has cancer...because I had him vaccinated (for the MMR). I was booed when I walked out of the hearing room, all because I asked to stop/limit philosophical and religious exemptions for vaccinations, in order to keep my child alive. Many of those who were angry had their children with them. A luxury I do not have. I couldn't bring my immunocompromised child into a building where hundreds are not vaccinated, in the middle of a measles outbreak.

Misinformation is compounded by unfounded fear. When the outbreak occurred, we immediately sought advice from our pediatric hemeOnc team and Doernbecher's infectious disease teams. Here are the facts. There is a 20-70% chance that immunocompromised kids will die from measles. Upwards of 7/10 kids could die from contracting measles from an un or under vaccinated person. Those are risks I am not willing to take. Before mass vaccination for the measles began, measles killed nearly 2.6 million people worldwide (WHO). It still kills more than 100,000 people a year, mostly children under five. One in 1,000 people who catch measles with die. And those are people who are not immunocompromised. Nowhere in the literature of any book or article that promotes anti-vaccination does it talk about those whose immune systems are compromised.

Right now, Oregon and Southwest Washington are seeing first-hand the effects of the current measles outbreak on individuals, families, our caregivers and our community.

This outbreak was preventable. This outbreak should be a lesson to our community that we have to do a better job managing information and education to those who need it most. Those who opt out of vaccinating their children could place other vulnerable members of the population, including infants and those with compromised immune systems, at greater risk for exposure.

This bill does not take away a parent's rights to make decisions about their children's healthcare. It requires that children be vaccinated in order to attend school to protect the health of other students, teachers, staff and our community.

Vaccines save lives. Please support HB 3063!

Thank you,
Jessica Fichtel
Mom of #bigherokai