

Date: February 26, 2019

To: Oregon State Legislature, Senate Committee on Healthcare

Re: HB 3603

Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

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

During my then five-year-old daughter's cancer treatment in 2016, I had a lot to worry about. How would she get through cold and flu season with a compromised immune system? How would the treatments affect her? Would the treatment even be successful (it was)? One thing I did not have to worry too much about ... would she be exposed at school to a vaccine-preventable illness, like measles, that her weakened immune system was unable to handle? That's because her school had 100% compliance on vaccines that year, keeping her (and other immune-compromised children) protected. Had a measles outbreak like the current one in Clark County occurred at that time we would have been operating with an even higher level of caution than we were already, avoiding public places like OMSI and the MODA Center, but at least school would have been relatively safe for her.

Every vulnerable child in Oregon should have this same safety net. But sadly, many do not. We were lucky in that her school was private and only served about 50 preschool and kindergarten students total. Some schools in our area have that many students, if not more, per grade. And each year more and more parents of these students are bypassing vaccines for non-medical reasons. This increases the risk of exposure to diseases like measles exponentially for kids with cancer, or organ transplants, or any number of conditions that affect the way the immune system functions. How terribly heartbreaking it must be for a child undergoing chemotherapy to have to miss school — even on a good day — because a classmate's parent has decided to listen to conspiracy theories, anecdotes and "studies" that were long-ago debunked rather than medical experts and evidence-based science. Even worse, how heartbreaking (and frankly, unacceptable) it would be for a cancer-stricken child to contract measles for the same reason. A hospital stay would be likely, as would disruption and delays in treatment. That child could even lose their life.

It used to be that the vaccine-hesitant community's main talking point centered on the perceived risk of the vaccine itself. They claimed that vaccines caused autism and that by vaccinating your children you were exposing them to harmful/toxic chemicals. Therefore, the risk of the vaccine — in their opinion — was greater than the risk of the disease it was meant to prevent. They still make those (false) claims, but lately they

have taken it to another level. Now, their rhetoric is extremely frightening. Not only are vaccines dangerous, they say, but the diseases vaccines prevent are *not* dangerous. They say, for example, that measles is a benign childhood illness, that measles is nothing more than the flu with a rash, that the measles virus boosts your immune system and that the measles vaccine “sheds” and is therefore responsible for any measles outbreak that may occur. Some even claim, and I cringe to even write this, that the measles virus can protect you from cancer.

We no longer have the luxury of allowing this small but growing (and vocal) minority to influence public health policy. We need to stand up for truth and stop them in their tracks before this small measles outbreak becomes a bona fide epidemic, before other diseases (like polio) make a comeback and before this dangerous cause gains even more ground.

School should be a safe place for all children. Parents who opt out of vaccines for non-medical reasons are ensuring that it is NOT safe for all children. If they make this choice, they should by default be making the choice to either a) homeschool their kids or b) find out if they are eligible to receive a legitimate medical exemption from a qualified healthcare professional. I really don't think this is too much to ask. They have options. The vulnerable among us do not.

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

Sincerely,
Dawn Weinberger
Hillsboro, Oregon