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To: Chair Representative Andrea Salinas and Members of the House Healthcare Committee

As a naturopathic physician who has counseled families about immunization for over 30 years, and as an Oregon constituent and parent, I would like to share my views on the proposed elimination of religious and philosophical exemptions for immunizations in Oregon for children who attend public school.

I am a proponent of immunization and believe that achieving higher rates of coverage will benefit all of our Oregon communities. However, I also believe that education is the best means to reach this goal, rather than coercion by our state government. I also believe that a “one size fits all” immunization schedule may not be to the benefit of all Oregon children.

Although I realize that the recent Washington/Oregon measles outbreak has added urgency to this issue, I think that it is important to take some time to evaluate the impact of mandatory immunizations. For example, there are now 31 immunizations that would be required. Some, such as the MMR and the DPT do play a significant role in achieving community immunity. Others, such as Hepatitis B, address the risks of specific groups of people, such as health workers, and do not pose a threat in the school setting. Because of this, some parents may choose to postpone or refrain from this particular immunization and this choice does not pose the type of risk that should keep a child out of the public school system. A re-evaluation of the required immunizations, in terms of which are truly necessary to promote community immunity, seems a prudent step before enforcement of legislation.

Parents want to do the best for their children. I have found this particularly true in the area of immunization. Parents have scheduled dedicated appointments and requested literature to thoroughly comprehend this topic; they want to be educated. Many parents who were initially “anti-immunization” changed their minds after a more detailed delving into the subject. Answering difficult questions such as, “How would you feel if your child developed a life threatening disease that could have been prevented?” and truly understanding the risks of preventable diseases in the non-immunized child has clarified that immunization is a sound choice. They feel good about their informed decision.

Parents are often far more astute than physicians at noticing the first signs of developmental delay or chronic illness in their children. To deny a parent the right to delay an immunization, based on a subtle observation of their child, perhaps not yet fully

manifest to their physician, creates a divisiveness between the individual and his or her physician and government.

Although considered generally safe, immunizations are not without risk, as demonstrated by the data collected by the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), which most concur is highly under reported. To force a parent to undertake something potentially harmful for their child when the opportunity exists for him or her to be a partner in this decision, through education and discussion with their physician, and to feel good about it, seems ultimately undermining to trust in government.

Although it is not my intention to discuss the science of immunization, I would like to address our ever, expanding understanding of genetics, and, in particular, the single nucleotide polymorphisms, which are implicated in the differing metabolic and detoxification capacities of individuals. Perhaps not every child can process vaccine adjuvants with the same efficiency, and he/she would benefit from a more protracted immunization schedule, or that these children might be the ones who have adverse reactions. These subtle variations are not necessarily correlated with overt disease and might not qualify for a medical exemption by some physicians, although parents might be aware of them due to the accessibility of genetic testing. Fixed immunization schedules may not be optimal in every case. Our laws need to protect this possibility.

It is profoundly important to respect Oregon parents, knowing that they are doing the best for their children, and that many are dedicated researchers, searching for optimal choices for their unique family situations. It would be much better for the morale of our state, to encourage parents to make informed decisions through education, rather than coerce them via legislation.

Sincerely,

Gloria Schwartz, N.D.