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Date January 23, 2023

TO: The Honorable Rob Nosse, Chair  
House Committee on Behavioral Health and Health Care

FROM: Dean Sidelinger, Health Officer and State Epidemiologist  
Office of the State Public Health Director  
Public Health Division  
Oregon Health Authority

SUBJECT: House Bill 2278

Chair Nosse and members of the committee; I am Dean Sideliner, Health Officer and State Epidemiologist of the Oregon Health Authority. I am here to request your support for House Bill 2278.

This past December, Oregon hospitals were hit with a surge of pediatric admissions for both influenza and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) forcing multiple Portland-area hospitals to temporarily implement crisis standards of care in their pediatric departments. There is no vaccine available yet for RSV, but annual flu shots have been recommended for all young children, starting at 6 months of age, since 2002. However, vaccines only work when they're administered. As of January 4, 2023, only 27% of Oregon children under 18 years of age received a flu shot.

Access to flu vaccine is still an issue, particularly for babies and toddlers who typically receive their vaccine during an office visit with their medical provider. Extra office visits require parents to take time off work and may need to be scheduled weeks in advance. The Immunization Program has received letters from parents asking why their young children can't be vaccinated in the pharmacy with the rest of their family.

House Bill 2278 would allow pharmacists to vaccinate any person aged 6 months or older with a flu shot. The bill does not require any pharmacist to administer vaccines to infants

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if they are not comfortable doing so, but it would allow trained pharmacists to offer flu vaccine to all family members at the same visit.

Beginning at 3 years of age, children receive their flu vaccine in the deltoid muscle just like adults, and many vaccine formulations call for same dose for all ages. To vaccinate children younger than 3, pharmacists would need some additional training to vaccinate in the anterolateral thigh muscle.

Passage of House Bill 2278 would allow Oregon to join the 20 other states that allow pharmacists to vaccinate all ages with influenza vaccine, including all of our contiguous neighboring states.

House bill 2278 will not fix all access issues for pediatric flu vaccines. Federal Medicaid rules require children enrolled in the Oregon Health Plan to be vaccinated by a Vaccines for Children (VFC) enrolled provider. Although pharmacies may participate in VFC, only 2 Oregon pharmacies are currently enrolled, probably because some policies create barriers to enrollment. Federal rules require VFC-participating pharmacists to vaccinate uninsured children, creating a financial barrier to families and a financial loss for the pharmacy, and they also require participating pharmacies to carry two separate stocks of vaccine—one for commercially-insured children and one for VFC-eligible children—creating a potential financial loss for the pharmacy.

I would be happy to address any questions or concerns you have about children's flu vaccines. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the committee today.