

Chair Patterson, Vice-Chair Hayden, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Lara Knudsen and I'm a family physician here in Salem. I run a small, 2-doctor practice called Happy Doc Family Medicine. I am testifying today in strong support of Senate Bill 42.

When COVID vaccines first became available, free of charge from the government, our clinic partnered with community groups serving Pacific Islanders and Latinx farm workers, and we were able to vaccinate many people who were uninsured and who never step inside a clinic. This was very satisfying; we know vaccines are among the cheapest, most effective health interventions out there to keep everyone safe. Unfortunately, when the vaccines were no longer provided for free, we couldn't continue these outreach events. We joined the waitlist for the Vaccine Access Program.

The Vaccine Access Program does two things. First, it allows clinics like mine to host community events and give away vaccines to people who otherwise may not have much interaction with the health care system. It means we can vaccinate our own patients, too, like a mom I saw last week who is between jobs and uninsured.

The second thing it does is allow us to vaccinate more kids. Let me explain how. The federal program, Vaccines for Children, provides free vaccines for kids with Medicaid, but clinics who want to be VFC providers have to stock an entire set of ALL vaccines, twice - one set for Medicaid kids, and one for everyone else. For small clinics like mine, that's not financially possible, which means we have to send our kids elsewhere to get their shots. In the Vaccine Access Program, I could purchase just the quantity of vaccines that I need and will use, which then means I can vaccinate all those kids in my own clinic.

Getting vaccines now to everyone who wants them is crucial. In 2024, Oregon saw its highest number of measles cases in 30 years and its largest pertussis outbreak in 50 years. Meanwhile, pediatric immunization rates have dropped to their lowest levels since 2018. I've worked in countries like Uganda, South Africa, and Peru, and I've seen plenty of illness and even death from easily-preventable diseases. If we lose the Vaccine Access Program now, we are opening the door to disease outbreaks that will strain our hospitals and put our most vulnerable patients at risk. If this bill does not pass, not only will clinics like mine not be able to join, but two-thirds of the clinics already in the program will not be able to continue this work. This will hit rural communities the hardest.

The \$6.8 million in this bill is a smart, forward-thinking investment in Oregon's public health infrastructure. Because the program replenishes funds through quarterly billing, this one-time investment will have long-term benefits—keeping clinics stocked and preventing expensive hospitalizations.

I urge you to vote in favor of SB 42 to protect access to vaccines for all Oregonians. Our state cannot afford to let this program fail.

Thank you,

Lara Knudsen, MD MPH
Happy Doc Family Medicine
and WVP Health Authority