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On Behalf Of: Childhood Health Associates of Salem
Committee: Senate Committee On Health Care
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1598

My friends ...

I write to you urgently today from the perspective of a pediatrician with 30 years of experience here in Oregon's state capital of Salem to call upon you to support Senate Bill 1598.

Last fall my email inbox and my phone were peppered with concerned messages from friends. "It's so confusing! How do we know if we can get the flu shot/COVID shot this fall?" One friend in particular stands out for me ... her husband is still on chemotherapy following prostate cancer and their daughter is still in high school. They worried that their teenager would not be able to be protected against COVID and would bring it home to her father.

Same thing at the office: our operators and our phone advice nurses took call after call from worried parents who wanted to be proactive with regard to preventing winter respiratory illnesses in their children and in themselves. The information available to the public was both confusing and conflicting ... while OHA did its best to communicate facts and troubleshoot within the system, families were instead hearing from a federal government whose public health agencies now wanted to downplay the importance and effectiveness of immunizations for influenza and COVID and who appeared to want to limit COVID vaccine to only the very high-risk groups.

Anyone who got decent grades in high school science classes knows that it's just not that simple. The best way to protect the elderly, the medically fragile, and the very young is to not only vaccinate them against diseases such as flu and COVID but to also vaccinate those around them, surrounding them with a cocoon of safety. And while the news media doesn't talk about it very much, every respiratory season healthy people die from influenza and COVID. As of late last week at least 60 children had died in the USA from influenza during the current season. Most were healthy. Almost all were unvaccinated against flu for the 2025-2026 season.

So we did what we could. We immunized our staff. We immunized our patients as soon as we had vaccine in stock, but the large pharmacy chains (as always) received their stock first. We sent in prescription after prescription for COVID vaccines for our patients, in many cases having to get quite creative with diagnosis codes in order to give our patients the best chance of both getting the vaccines and of making sure that their insurance paid for the shot. Governor Kotek's executive order finally cut through the nonsense.

SB 1598 is of course not any kind of vaccine mandate. Its purpose is to allow OHA to act quickly and decisively to prevent the delays and confusion that we saw last fall. It's a logical extension of our participation in the West Coast Health Alliance.

Please pass SB 1598 out of committee and please support it in the final vote.