

Health Department



Date: February 11, 2026

To: Oregon Senate Committee On Health Care

From: Multnomah County Health Department
Kirsten Aird, MPH, Public Health Director
Dr. Richard Bruno, MD, MPH, Multnomah County & Tri County Health Officer

RE: Written Testimony for Measure SB 1598

Chair Patterson and Members of the Senate Committee on Health Care,

The Multnomah County Health Department respectfully submits this testimony in support of SB 1598.

As Oregon's most populous county, Multnomah County sees firsthand both the life-saving benefits of vaccination and the real risks that emerge when vaccine access is disrupted. SB 1598 is a necessary and timely update to Oregon statute that ensures our state's immunization policies remain grounded in science, responsive to local conditions, and protective of public health.

SB 1598 allows Oregon to rely on Oregon-specific, science-based medical recommendations rather than being constrained by federal references that may not reflect local needs or circumstances. This flexibility is essential for maintaining trust in public health guidance and ensuring that recommendations continue to come from credible, evidence-based medical authorities.

Equally important, SB 1598 preserves insurance coverage for vaccines and protections for vaccine providers. In Multnomah County, many pediatric and family medicine practices already face challenges obtaining vaccines that fall outside the federal Vaccines for Children program. When providers are unable to stock or offer recommended vaccines, families encounter barriers to care, missed opportunities for immunization, and delays that increase the risk of disease transmission. SB 1598 helps ensure that vaccination decisions stay between providers and their patients, and that providers can continue to offer a full range of recommended vaccines without passing unnecessary financial or logistical hurdles onto families.

Vaccination rates in Oregon remain below the threshold needed to protect communities from outbreaks of highly contagious diseases such as measles. With only 90.5% of kindergarteners fully vaccinated for measles statewide, we are well short of the approximately 95% coverage needed for community immunity. In a county with dense population centers, international travel, and significant community interaction, even small gaps in vaccination coverage can quickly lead to outbreaks with serious health and economic consequences.

Health Department



Current national measles outbreaks underscore how real and urgent this threat is. Measles was officially eliminated in the U.S. in 2000, thanks to broad vaccine coverage and strong public health infrastructure. For many young adults and a generation of children, growing up without the everyday fear of measles and other devastating vaccine-preventable diseases is the norm. Today, however, sustained outbreaks across multiple states have driven case counts to their highest levels in decades, and the nation is likely to lose its hard-won elimination status.

Older generations vividly remember the threat these illnesses posed. Before vaccines were widely available, measles was a routine and feared childhood disease with serious complications. That lived experience reminds us how fragile these public health gains are and how essential it is that we act now to safeguard healthier childhoods for all Oregon families, both today and in the future.

From a local public health perspective, preventing outbreaks is far more effective, and far less costly, than responding to them. Measles and other vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks require intensive public health investigations, contact tracing, community outreach, and medical response. These efforts divert limited public health resources away from other essential services and place significant strain on healthcare systems, the already reduced public health workforce, families, and employers. SB 1598 is a proactive investment that helps Oregon avoid these preventable costs while protecting the health of children and communities.

SB 1598 aligns Oregon with other West Coast states that have taken steps to safeguard vaccine access and ensure continuity of care. It reflects Oregon's longstanding commitment to science-based public health policy and to protecting the wellbeing of our residents.

For these reasons, the Multnomah County Health Department urges your support of SB 1598. Thank you for the opportunity to comment and for your continued commitment to protecting the health of Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Aird, MPH
Public Health Director
Multnomah County Health Department

Dr. Richard Bruno, MD, MPH
Multnomah County & Tri County Health Officer

Submitted by Tom Powers, Multnomah County Government Relations tom.powers@multco.us