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In Support of House Bill 559

Submitted to the Ohio House Health Committee

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Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on HB 559.

As a nurse who vaccinates, and as the Director of Immunization Programs for the Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, I spend my time as a healthcare provider and educator working with families and providers to educate them on vaccines, and therefore I am here today not to discuss the specifics of the bill, but rather to give you some background information about vaccines, their safety and efficacy and the need for HB 559 to keep our herd immunity in Ohio.

First let's touch on safety. Before a vaccine is ever approved and licensed, it goes through years of testing for safety and effectiveness. Neither the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) nor government agencies like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention would recommend a vaccine that had not passed the tests for safety and effectiveness. Of course, no vaccine or medicine is perfect, but the risk of a grave adverse reaction to antibiotics is much greater than the risk from vaccines. Panels of experts have confirmed again and again that today's vaccines are safer than ever. In fact, the greatest risks come when children are *not* immunized.

Second, let's discuss those who are and those who are not immunized and why we are concerned about a growing population of under or non immunized people. The concept of vaccination is "herd immunity". Others have called it "ring immunity" or even "cocooning". This concept is based on protecting most of the "herd" and thus even if a disease is introduced into a community, it cannot cause a large outbreak because most of the "herd" already is immune by being vaccinated.

For "herd immunity" to be effective, at least 80% and preferably over 90% of the population is immune to the infection. When the immunity drops below this level, there are a significant number of people susceptible to the infection and thus it can more easily be passed from person to person leading to an "outbreak" or "epidemic" (depending on the number of cases).

We have some people who cannot be immunized (due to a weakened immune system) and others who are too young (and maybe too old) to effectively respond to vaccines. In addition to this group of people being unable to be immunized; they often are the group who get the sickest if they do contract the infection.

Vaccination is a pivotal part of PUBLIC HEALTH. And one of the keys to PUBLIC HEALTH is that the PUBLIC in its entirety participates.

There are a number of court cases that have sided with vaccination as a public health measure and that the good of the public must be taken into account.

When people, who have no medical contraindication or religious objection, and do not get vaccinated; they are exposing others to harmful diseases. They are hoping that others will be vaccinated and thus they don't need the vaccine. So, in effect, the non-vaccinators are taking the benefit and asking the others to take the risks.

I often hear "but why do I have to worry about diseases like polio or small pox that no one gets anymore?" Unfortunately, as more people decide NOT to vaccinate, we are seeing these diseases come back. Thirty years ago, polio paralyzed more than 350,000 children each year in more than 125 countries around the world. Since then, the highly contagious virus has been reduced by more than 99% but there were 8 cases reported this year. In a time of global travel, these diseases are just an airplane trip away. Or let's look at measles. In 2,000, measles was declared eradicated from the United States, but due to a false study linking the MMR vaccine to autism, a study that has now been disproved and retracted and even has groups like Autism Speaks saying that vaccines 100% do NOT cause autism, we have measles back in this country. In fact, we had an outbreak of measles in Ohio a few years ago that was three times worse than the outbreak everyone talked about from Disneyland.

More than three million people still die around the world **each year** from vaccine-preventable diseases.

The Ohio AAP and our members understand that parents may have concerns about immunizing their children, and that is why we support HB 559, which does not take away a parents rights, but instead calls for a conversation with a health care provider to discuss any concerns they might have, but also to make sure they then receive factual information about the importance of vaccines.