



House Health Committee

Proponent Testimony – Ohio Association of School Nurses

Chair Stephen Huffman, Vice Chair Theresa Gavarone, Ranking Member Nickie Antonio and members of the House Health Committee.

It is the position of the Ohio Association of School Nurses that immunizations are essential to primary prevention of disease from infancy through adulthood. Therefore, the Ohio Association of School Nurses supports House Bill 559, because immunizations protect students, their families, teachers and other school staff from preventable illnesses.

The impact of vaccines in reducing and eliminating vaccine-preventable diseases has been one of the 10 great public health achievements in the United States (CDC, 2011). The CDC estimates that vaccination of children born between 1994 and 2013 will prevent 322 million illnesses, help avoid 732,000 deaths, and save nearly \$1.4 trillion in total societal costs (CDC, 2014c).

While immunization rates remain high for vaccines mandated for school entry, there are pockets of unvaccinated children which exist across the country, resulting in increasing outbreaks of diseases previously nearly eradicated and have resulted in recent outbreaks of measles and pertussis (CDC, 2014d, 2014e).

OASN recently asked their membership to share experiences with students and parents choosing exemptions. This is one example of an outcome of choosing to not immunize possibly due to lack of understanding the risks:

I have had a family that previously had Immunizations waivers (for two children) and the oldest contracted pertussis in Kindergarten and was out for 2 months. The illness was spread to the other preschool child and an infant in the home. The house was under quarantine for a bit! The parents then decided to get the children immunized and are now all up to date.

School Nurses are already active in monitoring students and their immunization status. This bill will assist the nurse's role in disease prevention through more comprehensive rules regarding the exemption of students who are not immunized. Ohio immunization rates and their accuracy should improve by increasing school district responsibility of reporting on all students not adequately immunized per Ohio Department of Health's recommendations and by allowing public access to the results.

Currently, in the state of Ohio we have districts that regularly follow the law regarding exclusion from school and sadly we have other districts that do not strictly follow the current laws. It is too easy for administrators to ask for an exemption form and have a parent sign it without the family being fully knowledgeable about the vaccine and the disease it is designed to prevent. HB559 helps in providing the extra step of assuring that parents/guardians requesting exemptions do so based on having factual knowledge.

OASN supports that the parent/guardian of students must obtain a signed exemption form from a physician or other licensed vaccine administration provider in order to exempt a child from receiving an immunization. It is important that parents/guardians have the opportunity to individually obtain factual information regarding the potential outcome should their child have the disease. These vaccine preventable diseases can often be deadly

or cause serious complications in healthy children let alone children with chronic health conditions. We cannot predict which children will contract vaccine preventable diseases.

This bill promotes providing factual information regarding the disease as well as the risks and benefits of immunization. OASN has had some members state that they have schools which have at least 10% of the school population with non-medical exemptions. The reasons for non-medical exemptions are usually the autism concern or religious beliefs. While we respect a parent/guardian's right to exempt, OASN supports the opportunity of having vaccine and vaccine preventable disease information presented by a health care provider.

Our schools are seeing an increase in attendance of medically fragile students as they are increasingly surviving to school age. Consequently, there are more students in school who have serious medical conditions that prohibit them from receiving certain vaccinations and their exposure to a vaccine preventable disease may be deadly. HB 559 provides the opportunity for these parents/guardians to determine which schools may be unsafe for their child to attend due to the percentage of unimmunized students in the building.

The Ohio Association of School Nurses promotes optimal wellness among Ohio's school children and their communities by supporting their educational success and providing leadership, education and support for the practice of school nursing.

REFERENCES

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