



May 13th, 2015

Testimony of Dr. Dennis Cunningham

Senate Bill 121—Meningococcal Vaccine
House Health and Aging Committee

Chairwoman Gonzales, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the House Health and Aging Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate bill 121. As a representative of the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and Nationwide Children's Hospital, I fully support Senator Hite's bill to require vaccination against Meningococcus (*Neisseria meningitidis*).

This bacterium, which is spread between people, can cause death in as little as a few hours after the first symptom. Initial symptoms include fever, chills, and possibly headache. These symptoms can present similarly to viral illnesses such as influenza. Even the most skilled physician cannot recognize a patient with early Meningococcal disease in the middle of a respiratory virus season. The disease can lead to sepsis (bacteria in blood causing shock) or meningitis (bacteria infect linings of the brain and spinal cord). Vaccination is the best protection we have.

Meningococcal is one of the most frightening diseases a parent could face. Even with appropriate, immediate medical therapy shock, seizures, coma, and death can occur. Unfortunately I have treated patients with this disease who died. Survivors may have long term problems including deafness (one or both ears), seizures, hydrocephalus (extra fluid in brain) requiring a shunt, or retardation. Amputation of hands/feet and sometimes entire extremities may occur.

Looking at the Ohio Department of Health website, in 2012 Ohio had 24 cases of Meningococcal disease. The median number of diseases each year in Ohio between 2008 and 2012 was 35 cases. In addition to these individuals, the disease impacts family members, and members of the general public exposed to this frightening disease. For these reasons, I strongly support Senator Hite's bill. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

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