

Testimony of TONYA ANKENY

Finance – Health and Medicaid Subcommittee

Re: House Bill 49 - State Operating Budget

Opposition to Ohio Chapter AAP proposal to change immunization exemption and tracking processes

May 24, 2017

Chair Hackett, Vice Chair Tavares, and distinguished members of the Finance – Health and Medicaid Subcommittee:

In June 2003, my daughter's and our whole family's lives were forever changed by a vaccine injury. Prior to that, I didn't even know what happened to Audra was possible. I knew that vaccines could shed because, at 8 months, she had developed chicken pox after two siblings were vaccinated for it. However, at 10 months, 4 days after receiving Hep B and DTaP vaccines, Audra went into respiratory failure and paralysis. She flat-lined 4 times during that first week in the hospital!

She would be diagnosed officially with transverse myelitis and acute demyelinating encephalomyelitis secondary to the Hep B and DTaP vaccine reactions. She was in the hospital for a total of 6 months, unable to breathe on her own until three years later, required multiple surgeries and spinal rod placement due to severe scoliosis, and remains paralyzed in a wheelchair to this day, nearly 14 years later. In fact, right now, we are at the Dayton Children's Hospital waiting for her to heal from her spinal surgery. We were hoping this would be the last one because she has grown enough to not need more; however, she has encountered some issues with the wound not healing properly.



Audra was left with neurogenic bladder and is in the beginning stages of kidney failure. For the last 5 years, she has endured spinal surgeries every 4 to 6 months until this, the 14th surgery, when she got her first infection and it went necrotic. She has undergone 10 surgeries in 6 weeks, 23 in all, which is why I can't be there in person to provide testimony. She would like for nothing more than to be able to enjoy her teenage years, to not be in so much pain and so lonely.

Audra's story been documented extensively. We won our case in Vaccine Court, even though it took years to process and required us to argue over things that Audra would need for however long she lives. In the process, my husband lost his job, and my family lost our car and home. And ours was one of the "easier" cases because the doctors admitted what had happened. For others, there is an even longer court time and sometimes no award. We are also "lucky" because our child lived; some are not so fortunate.

<http://muse.jhu.edu/article/646625>

Because doctors do not know what caused Audra to be vulnerable to the vaccines, all of my children have been given medical exemptions. However, if they hadn't been given medical exemptions, I would have chosen to use my own reasons of conscience to decline vaccination for them. How could I ever consider that again?!

I do not want my other children to be subjected to discrimination or otherwise singled out because we no longer vaccinate. Kids who are recently vaccinated with live-virus vaccines, like my two children who got varicella vaccine, can and do shed the virus. Is AAP going to protect all those immunocompromised kids by requiring kids recently vaccinated with live-virus vaccines to register, so the parents can also have those numbers? Are they going to track illness, chronic conditions, learning disabilities and missed school days by the vaccinated versus unvaccinated kids to see true health outcomes? Vaccination status is only one possible measure of risk.

I encourage the subcommittee to reject the Ohio Chapter of AAP's proposed amendment that would require a physician to educate and sign off for religious and reasons of conscience exemptions. In our experience, pediatricians (or anyone else!) cannot say that vaccines are safe and effective. Ever. Because they are not, for some people some of the time. And because of that, there must be choice.

Sincerely,

Tonya Ankeney