

## **NACDS Statement for the Record to the Ohio Senate Health Committee**

Wednesday, October 11, 2023

### **Support SB 144 – Important Legislation to Protect Parents’ Choice in Vaccine Access**

On behalf of our members operating over 1,400 chain pharmacies throughout Ohio, the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) strongly supports SB 144, important legislation that will allow parents of school-aged children in Ohio to have the option of continuing to access the full range of childhood vaccines at their local pharmacy. We appreciate Chairman Huffman and members of the Senate Health Committee considering our views on this important matter and we urge you to vote in support of this bill.

Recognizing that pharmacies are a critical point of access to care for many Americans, the federal government acted under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act (“PREP Act”) during the COVID-19 public health emergency to temporarily authorize pharmacists throughout the country to order and administer CDC recommended vaccines to children 3 and older. To enhance pharmacies’ capacity to meet public demand for immunizations and other essential pharmacy care services, the federal government further authorized trained pharmacy technicians to perform the technical task of vaccine administration.

In Ohio, where the existing laws limit pharmacists’ authority to administer vaccines to children 7 years and older, and required a physician’s prescription for any vaccine other than for flu or COVID-19 administered to someone 13 years and younger, these federal allowances made it possible for parents to have their children receive all recommended childhood vaccines at the pharmacy if a parent chose to do so. Unfortunately, when the COVID-19 public health emergency ended on May 11, 2023, the temporary allowances for pharmacists to order and administer the full portfolio of recommended childhood vaccines under their own authority expired. As a result, parents again are limited in their choice to have their younger children receive vaccines at their pharmacy.

Enacting SB 144 into law will restore parents’ choice to have their school-aged children receive vaccines at pharmacies by aligning pharmacists’ authority to order and administer childhood vaccines to children 5 years of age and older, and to continue leveraging the full pharmacy team – including pharmacists, pharmacy interns, and pharmacy technicians - in delivering these services to patients.

The experience of the last few years has demonstrated that parents in Ohio appreciate having the option to seek out childhood vaccine services from pharmacy providers. In most communities, pharmacists are the most accessible healthcare provider - with 90% of Americans living within 5 miles of a pharmacy. Pharmacies are often open on nights and weekends when most pediatrician offices are closed, providing busy parents with convenient options to seek this care outside of work and school hours. In fact, more than 756,000 children in Ohio received childhood vaccines in pharmacies over the last 2 ½ years, making it clear that parents throughout Ohio appreciate the unparalleled convenience and access of pharmacies for vaccine services.

The availability of childhood vaccines in the pharmacy setting also improves access to care for families who live in one of Ohio's 182 primary care shortage areas, other underserved areas, or who lack a primary care provider:

- According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, in 2021, 48.8% of children in Ohio – roughly 1.25 million individuals – did not have a medical home.
- About 50% of pharmacy COVID-19 vaccination sites were in areas of high social vulnerability
- More than 40% of individuals vaccinated at pharmacies for COVID-19 were from racial and ethnic minority groups.

Pharmacists under Ohio law already report vaccines administered to children to their primary care provider, and under the requirements of SB 144 would inform parents of the importance of well-child visits with a pediatrician or other primary care and refer children as appropriate. This legislation will further enable pharmacists to work in tandem with pediatricians and other clinicians to deliver recommended childhood vaccines to children and fill gaps in care for children who might otherwise go unvaccinated due to lack of access.

**To restore and support parents' choice to seek vaccine services for their children at their local pharmacies, we urge you to vote in support of SB 144.**