

Good morning,

Chairpersons and members of the committee,

My name is Becky Morrison. In 2000 I founded a chartered non-public school in Ohio designed to serve children with autism from early childhood through high school. Our vision has always been to create a model where children with autism learn alongside their neurotypical peers in social immersion classrooms. Over the past twenty-five years, our school has served thousands of students and worked closely with families affected by autism. One reality that is important for policymakers to understand is that vaccines and immunization schedules are highly sensitive and controversial subjects among the autism community.

Regardless of where individuals stand scientifically or personally on this issue, it is undeniable that thousands of parents believe their child experienced developmental regression and the first signs of autism shortly after receiving immunizations given during the first two years of the child's life.

Whether these experiences are viewed as coincidence, correlation, or causation, the fact remains that these parents are trying to make the best decisions they can for their children. Their concerns shape how they approach healthcare, education, and school enrollment. This is especially true with the prevalence of autism now reaching 1 in every 34 children.

Because our school serves children from birth through high school, we work with families across a wide range of perspectives and medical circumstances. Therefore, since its inception Oakstone has honored immunization exemptions. Approximately half of our families apply for immunization exemptions for their children with autism and any siblings.

With over 600 students, Oakstone Academy has never experienced an epidemic, except for rare lice breakouts). We focus on environmental hygienic technology and environmental sanitization. We follow strict procedures for handling children who develop a temperature or become ill while at school.

My purpose in speaking today is to share the experiences of the families we serve and to offer an example of a healthy school environment that honors parent immunization exemptions. Please pass the Parental C.H.O.I.C.E Act.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to serving the children and families of Ohio.

Rebecca Morrison, Ph.D.