

Chairman/Chairwoman/Chairperson Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member White, and members of the Health Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Tara Smith. I am an infectious disease epidemiologist and professor in the state and am strongly opposed to HB561.

We are in the midst of the worst measles epidemic in the country in a generation, and on the cusp of losing our measles elimination status as a nation. There are current cases of this infection in our state. We have had large outbreaks of whooping cough in the US this year, with an estimated 10 infant deaths from this preventable infection. Vaccine hesitancy has increased in part due to actions by our HHS Secretary. This has left many innocent children unprotected from these diseases, which can not only be harmful in their acute stage but also cause lifelong complications.

We already have vaccine exemptions in the state, and our measles vaccination rate is below that necessary to maintain herd immunity. This bill will only further weaken protections for the children in the state, including those too young to be vaccinated, or those who are immunocompromised. Both groups rely on community immunity to protect them from disease spread. This bill in particular affects preschools and daycare centers, where the most vulnerable children attend.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill and continue to protect the children in our state. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.