

March 19, 2024

The Honorable Jim Justice
Governor, State of West Virginia
State Capitol
1900 Kanawha Blvd. E.
Charleston, WV 25305

Re: AMA opposition to HB 5105, eliminating certain childhood immunization requirements

Dear Governor Justice:

On behalf of the physician and medical student members of the American Medical Association (AMA), I am writing to urge you to veto House Bill (HB) 5105, legislation that would exempt children in private, parochial, and virtual schools from childhood immunization requirements.

One of the greatest public health success stories in history is the remarkable decrease in infectious diseases due to the use of vaccines. Unfortunately, the immense success of immunization programs in the United States has lulled some into complacency with regard to vaccine-preventable diseases like measles, meningitis, polio and diphtheria. In order for previous successes to be maintained, we must recognize that these diseases still exist and can still debilitate and kill. Indeed, the recent and continuing outbreak of measles serves to remind us that our nation's children are still vulnerable to these deadly diseases.

Vaccines not only protect the child who receives them, but just as importantly, they protect the health of the community in which the child lives. Research indicates that people who have not been vaccinated can increase the incidence of disease in their community by as much as 30 percent.^[1] However, when vaccination levels are high, children who cannot be protected directly by the vaccines are partially protected because they are not exposed to the disease. This includes infants too young to receive vaccinations and those with medical contraindications such as a child with leukemia who cannot safely be immunized.

West Virginia has long been a champion of strong immunization policies and, as a result, boasts some of the highest immunization rates in the country and low rates of vaccine-preventable diseases. Yet HB 5105 would exempt many school children from the very policies that have led to this success.

^[1] Daniel Salmon, Michael Haber, Eugene Gangarosa, et al., *Health Consequences of Religious and Philosophical Exemptions from Immunization Laws*, 282 JAMA 1, 47-53 (Jul. 1999).

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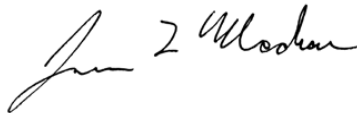
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Unfortunately, as we have recently seen, when even a few people opt out of immunization programs, disease outbreaks can spread and devastate communities. The recent reductions in vaccination coverage threaten to erase many years of progress as nearly eliminated and preventable diseases return, resulting in illness, disability, and death. We must stop this disturbing trend.

Based on all of the above, we strongly urge you to veto HB 5105.

Thank you for your attention to this important public health issue. If the AMA may be of assistance, please contact Annalia Michelman, JD, Senior Attorney, AMA Advocacy Resource Center, at annalia.michelman@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4788.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim L Madara". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jim" being particularly prominent.

James L. Madara, MD

cc: West Virginia State Medical Association
Brian Abraham, Chief of Staff, Office of the Governor
J. Bentley Berkeley, General Counsel, Office of the Governor