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February 19, 2015

The Honorable Eileen Cody
Chair
House Health & Wellness Committee
Washington House of Representatives
257A John L. O'Brien Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

Re: Washington House Bill 2009 - Support

Dear Chair Cody:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I am writing to express our support of House Bill (H.B.) 2009, legislation to eliminate the philosophical and personal exemptions from required childhood immunizations.

One of the greatest public health success stories is the remarkable decrease in infectious diseases due to the use of vaccines. Unfortunately, the immense success of vaccination in America has lulled many parents into complacency with regard to vaccine preventable diseases like measles, meningitis, polio and diphtheria. In order for previous successes to be maintained, the public and legislators must realize these diseases still exist and can still debilitate and kill. Indeed, the recent and continuing outbreaks of measles in over 17 states and the District of Columbia resulting in over 120 cases of measles, serve to remind us that our nation's children are only one unvaccinated carrier away from potentially deadly disease.

Vaccines are available for 22 different infectious diseases, and vaccines against 15 deadly diseases are recommended for use in all U.S. children. Vaccines not only protect the child that receives them, but just as important, they protect the health of the community in which the child lives. A scientific study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* indicated that those who did not receive measles vaccine due to philosophical or religious reasons were 35 times more likely to contract measles, and could potentially increase the incidence of measles in their community by as much as 30 percent.¹

When vaccination levels are high, children who cannot be protected directly by the vaccines are protected because they are not exposed to the disease. This includes children too young to receive vaccinations and those with medical contraindications such as a child with leukemia who cannot receive the measles vaccine.

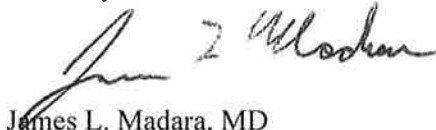
¹ Felkin DR, Lezotte DC, Hamman RF, Salmon DA, Chen RT, and Hoffman RE. Individual and Community Risks of Measles and Pertussis Associated with Personal Exemptions to Immunization. *JAMA* 2007; 284: 3145-3150

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Without successful vaccination programs, epidemics of vaccine-preventable diseases could return, resulting in increased illness, disability and death. With the eradication of some diseases, such as polio, so close at hand, any reduction in vaccination coverage for these diseases could erase many years of hard work and have an enormous negative impact on the public health of the United States. Philosophical and personal exemptions, especially if granted with little or no restrictions, provide a barrier to high immunization rates and work against the establishment of a successful vaccination program. By eliminating philosophical and personal exemptions for immunization as envisioned by H.B. 2009, Washington lawmakers can take positive steps to ensure Washington children receive the necessary vaccinations to protect not only their health, but the health of others. Should you decide to not eliminate philosophical and personal exemptions to immunizations, the AMA strongly urges that such exemptions be tightened and restricted so that they are not easily obtained without oversight. For example, philosophical exemptions should not be granted without documented consultation with a physician (MD or DO) and should have an expiration date, for example, one year.

We thank you for your consideration of our views on this issue, and we hope that this background information is helpful in your deliberations on H.B. 2009. If you need further information, please contact Carrie Armour, JD, Senior Legislative Attorney, Advocacy Resource Center, at carrie.armour@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4039.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "James L. Madara".

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Washington State Medical Association
House Health & Wellness Members