

February 6, 2019

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

Re: Support for elimination of non-medical exemptions from required childhood vaccines

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 for legislation to eliminate philosophical, personal and religious exemptions from required childhood vaccines.

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. 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 outbreak of measles in Washington serves to remind us that our nation's children are still vulnerable to these deadly diseases.

Vaccines not only protect the child that receives them, but just as importantly, 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.

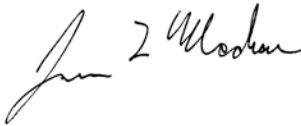
¹ Daniel Salmon, Michael Haber, Eugene Gangarosa, et al., *Health Consequences of Religious and Philosophical Exemptions from Immunization Laws*, 282 JAMA 1, 47-53 (Jul. 1999).

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As we have unfortunately seen, 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. Non-medical exemptions, especially when granted with few restrictions, provide a barrier to high immunization rates and work against the establishment of a successful vaccination program. By eliminating philosophical, personal and religious exemptions for immunization, Washington lawmakers can take a critical step toward ensuring Washington children receive the necessary vaccinations to protect not only their health, but the health of others.

We thank you for your consideration of our views on this important issue. If you need further information, please contact Annalia Michelman, JD, Advocacy Resource Center at annalia.michelman@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4788.

Sincerely,

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

James L. Madara, MD

cc: Washington State Medical Association