

House Bill 1638 Testimony

Olympia, Washington

February 8, 2019

- Good morning Madame Chair and committee members – for the record, my name is John Wiesman and I have the privilege of serving as your Secretary of Health.
- I'm here to testify in support of House Bill 1638.
- This bill eliminates the personal belief exemption for the measles, mumps, and rubella (or MMR) vaccine that is required for school and child care entry. This bill is about safe schools and protecting vulnerable children and adults.
- We are currently in the midst of a measles outbreak, a true public health emergency.
 - Over the last 10 years Washington has had three large measles outbreaks, one of which included the death of an immunocompromised person exposed to measles in a clinic waiting room.

- The outbreak we are dealing with right now is larger and infecting people faster than those of recent history.
- Outbreaks like this one are about unvaccinated children, not specific communities or ethnic groups. When you have a significant number of unvaccinated children all in the same community, attending the same schools and child care, that's when we have to be worried about measles.
- We know that the disease is spread easily and quickly in school settings, leaving our most vulnerable unprotected. Infants, pregnant women, and the immunocompromised, like those with cancer, depend on the rest of us to protect them. This is community immunity.
- Not only are we concerned about disease, outbreaks like this are a huge drain on our community infrastructure and economic vitality.
 - Let's not forget that schools, childcare centers, private business, healthcare facilities, and airports have all been affected.
- You will hear concerns from others today about the safety of the MMR vaccine but I want to remind you that the MMR vaccine is very safe with rare exceptions.

- All reputable scientific studies have found no relationship between MMR vaccine and autism.
- Yet there are potential life threatening complications that result from measles.
- One in 20 with measles will get pneumonia.
- One in 1,000 will develop encephalitis.
- And 2 of every 1,000 children with measles will die from it.
- The benefits definitely outweigh the risks.
- States that have tighter exemption laws have less disease and higher immunization rates, period.
- I urge you to support this bill as a public safety measure to help our state reach community immunity to prevent future outbreaks. Thank you.

Q&A Talking Point:

- Serious allergic reactions occur in fewer than one in a million