

Dear Chairman Weisz and Members of the Human Services Committee,

Dear Chairman Weisz and Members of the Human Services Committee,

My name is Paul Carson. I am a physician who specializes in the area of infectious diseases, and am a Professor at North Dakota State University in the Dept. of Public Health, where I am the Medical Director of the Center for Immunization Research and Education. However, my comments today are not on behalf of NDSU.

I am testifying today in opposition to HB 1320, which seeks to eliminate school mandates for vaccination prior to school entry.

I am a physician who is old enough to well remember one vaccine-preventable disease, namely Haemophilus influenzae meningitis. This used to be the most common cause of childhood meningitis, and caused deafness, brain damage, and death in 10s of thousands of children every year. In addition, it could cause a life-threatening condition called epiglottitis that could suffocate a child in minutes. We had one or more such children in the hospital most of the time when you rounded on a pediatric ward. This was a terribly frightening and devastating disease. Amazingly, my younger pediatric colleagues universally tell me they have never seen a case. They only know if it historically from medical books. It is virtually gone from North America. Thankfully, I am not old enough to remember even more devastating diseases that plagued our children in even greater numbers, like measles, diphtheria, and polio. All of these have faded from our collective memory, due to vaccination. And they are all poised to easily return when our vaccination rates decline. You don't have to take my word for this, but just look at NY, OR, CA, and our neighboring state of MN, all who have had serious measles outbreaks costing them millions of dollars to control in the last few years when their immunization rates fell below the herd-immunity threshold of around 90-95%.

Vaccines have been rightly acknowledged as one of the crowning achievements of modern health care and public health. To achieve their greatest benefit, namely herd immunity, where enough of the population is immune that a contagious pathogen cannot get a foothold and spread, we need immunization rates typically in the 90% -plus range. Children who cannot receive vaccines due to medical contraindications, or children who do not respond to a particular vaccine, rely on those children around them to be immune so as not be exposed to these illnesses.

One way our country has achieved this safe school environment and herd-level immunity is through daycare and school-immunization requirements. These requirements make sense, since these diseases most often affect children, who can easily spread these pathogens to one another in the confined spaces of a school classroom or daycare center. Our country has left the regulation of these school-vaccination mandates up to the individual states, and all states have implemented these mandates in one form or another. The Supreme Court has upheld the constitutionality of these laws not once, but twice. If ND were to pass HB 1320, we would become the only state in the union not to require a safer school and daycare environment through the entry requirement of vaccinations.

This bill is unnecessary for those individuals who are staunchly opposed to vaccination. North Dakota is one of only 16 states in the country that allows parents to request an exemption to their child's vaccination requirement, either on the basis of religious objection, or just personal belief. Furthermore, we are one of the easiest states in the country to get such an exemption. All they need to do is sign a

form stating they have a religious or personal belief objection to the vaccine, turn it in to the school secretary, and their child is free to attend school unvaccinated. And, parents are increasingly using these exemptions, which partially explains why ND kindergartners have ranked in the bottom half of the U.S. for vaccinations since 2011.

Please do not compromise our children's safety by further weakening our vaccination laws, which will surely lead to even lower vaccination rates than we already have, and vote no on HB-1320.