

Testimony
House Bill No. 1454
House Industry, Business and Labor Committee
Representative Jonathan Warrey, Chairman
January 29, 2025

Chairman Warrey and committee members, my testimony specifically addresses the issue of vaccination requirements.

My name is Alexa Johnson and I am a West Fargo mother of 6. My oldest two boys have autism.

We vaccinated our first son, Ray, at 4 months. Hours later he let out only what I can describe as "crack baby" screams. High-pitched, blood curdling sirens.

I frantically called our doctor's office and she refused to see him. She told me he was having a normal reaction. I believed her. But by the time Ray was 18 months old he was still not speaking.

Stupidly, we continued going to the same doctor when our second son, Ronnie, was born. His face was riddled with eczema and his dirty diapers were rancid. They smelled abnormally acidic. At this point I had started reading about alternative vaccination schedules...schedules that recommended only 1 immunization at a time.

"I'd like to space out Ronnie's shots," I announced to our doctor. "I'm worried about his immune system. And, uh, autism," I shyly said.

"There are NO studies that link vaccines to autism," she laughed. "Don't worry about that. Keep Ronnie on schedule."

And again, I did as I was told.

Ronnie's skin and diapers never improved. But he was an incredibly easy baby. He never fussed. When Ronnie was 18 months old he received his regularly scheduled vaccines. In the days that followed my easy baby turned into a nightmare. My easy sleeper now required hours of bouncing in a dark room to fall asleep. He had started speaking months earlier, but after those shots his vocabulary quit growing.

My boys were nearly impossible to potty train and refused to eat anything but a handful of favorite foods. Ronnie's favorite activity became grabbing anything out of the fridge--especially 18-packs of eggs--and smearing them into the carpet. He spit everywhere, often running to the sink or even the toilet if I dared leave the bathroom door open. Eventually he started banging his head against the wall when he was angry. When we left our rental in Williston we spent \$5,000 to repair the walls, replace the carpet and even the kitchen counter (stained by all his spitting).

Ray will graduate from West Fargo High next year, but probably will never have the awareness to drive, live on his own or support himself.

Ronnie, now 15, never learned to talk. He is still not fully toilet trained and now has epilepsy as well as severe autism. I would be standing in that room with you right now but we just got Ronnie home from the hospital. He spent 5 days there as a result of complications from a new psychiatric medication. He is increasingly violent with me and sometimes bangs his head and wrists to communicate. We have installed shatterproof windows and created a padded room for him in our home. We are currently getting quotes for a garage remodel to expand living space for him because he is wrecking our flooring by jumping on it vigorously with his heels. He sometimes stays awake for 30 hours at a time, despite many medications and treatments. It will cost tens of thousands of dollars to complete the project and we will lose our garage. Ronnie only goes to school for 4 hours each day. Getting consistent respite care for him has proved impossible. Thus far, I have been unable to work to contribute any money to our household. A respite staff shortage has been a long-term statewide problem for the disability community. Even when offered \$30/hr and a flexible schedule, most of our past hires have petered out. I could not even secure care for my mother's funeral. So I had to watch the livestream on my phone in the church parking lot while I cared for Ronnie.

My husband and I are terrified for our sons' futures. The thing we fear the most for our boys is sexual abuse at the hands of a caregiver. A 2011 Arc document states that children with intellectual disabilities are 4 times more likely to be sexually abused than neurotypical children. And that 49 percent of people with intellectual disabilities will experience sexual abuse 10 times within a lifetime. We have already fired one agency caregiver who we suspected was involved with a sex trafficker. My husband and I firmly believe we would not be in this current position if not for the vaccines. And these are the same shots currently required in North Dakota schools.

Were my boys genetically predisposed to autism? Absolutely. Did the shots push them over the edge into autism? Absolutely. No study or doctor can tell me otherwise. I saw what vaccines did to my boys with my own eyes.

The North Dakota public school vaccine requirement puts unfair pressure on parents' medical decisions. School staff in 2 school districts--Williston and West Fargo--have given me calculated and dishonest information about the existence of vaccine exemptions. Most parents do not know exemptions exist and in my personal experience, the schools like to keep it that way.

For the greater health of North Dakota and in honor of the unnecessary suffering of my children, I encourage a do pass recommendation.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

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