



Ascension

5/25/2017
Submitted by
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Chief Advocacy Officer

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May 22, 2017

The Honorable Tim Kelly
Chairman, House Education Reform committee
Michigan House of Representatives
N-1198 House Office Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Representative Kelly:

I am writing on behalf of Ascension Michigan to express our opposition to HB's 4425 & 4426, legislation we believe will result in fewer immunizations for Michigan children and increase the likelihood of an outbreak of infectious diseases in our schools and communities. This legislation would rescind an administrative rule implemented by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services in early 2015, that resulted in a significant decrease in the nonmedical waiver rate statewide, and eliminates the Department's ability to implement a rule that "imposes a different or additional requirement" from the existing statute to obtain a waiver for a nonmedical reason in the future. The rule that is the subject of this legislation requires parents seeking a nonmedical immunization waiver on behalf of their child/children who are enrolled in school or licensed child care programs to attend an educational session to be provided with information about vaccine-preventable diseases and vaccinations with county health department staff.

As a statewide health system comprised of five major health systems (part of Ascension Health; the nation's largest not-for-profit and largest Catholic health system with facilities in 24 states), hundreds of outpatient sites and thousands of physician partners, Ascension Michigan greatly values the historical contribution that vaccines have made in promoting significant decreases in cases of polio, diphtheria, measles, mumps, pertussis, rubella, smallpox, hepatitis A and B and other diseases. In addition, vaccination of adolescents against Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) represents an opportunity to address an increasing percentage of gynecologic and head and neck cancers, and immunization of young adults against meningitis will reduce risk for that rapidly progressive and potentially fatal infection. We see all of these efforts making a significant contribution to our present and future initiatives around population health as we strive to promote the health of the patients and communities we serve.

As healthcare providers we know there is an overwhelming body of peer-reviewed science proving that vaccines are safe and effective for children and adults who do not have medical conditions prohibiting them from receiving the vaccine. We see evidence every day in our hospitals, outpatient sites, and affiliated physician offices, of the growing public health threat posed to the



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desired group immunity level of 93 percent plus, as a result of a growing number of children over the past two decades who have not received medically recommended immunizations.

Additionally, we know that Michigan has historically had a high immunization waiver rate leaving students across the state at risk for preventable, potentially deadly diseases. Prior to the MDHHS rule's implementation the waiver process varied widely among Michigan's 45 local health jurisdictions contributing to confusion for parents. However, since the new rule was implemented, standardizing the waiver process across local health departments, the number of non-medical waivers in Michigan schools and childcare facilities have declined dramatically; from 2014-2016 there was a 33.3 percent decrease in the overall waiver rates in schools and a 27.3 percent decrease in waiver rates at childcare facilities, representing 18,000 fewer waivers requested by parents in the last two years.

Finally, we know from past experience that broad public education campaigns educating young parents about the medical safety and public health benefits of childhood immunizations work. This was evidenced in Michigan in the mid-1990's and early 2000's when the state achieved one of the nation's best childhood immunization rates, after previously having one of the worst rates. Subsequently, Ascension Michigan continues to strongly support the IVaccinate campaign, a statewide public education campaign promoting childhood immunizations. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this issue, please do not hesitate to contact me at 586-753-1120 or alternatively Sean Gehle in the Ascension Michigan Advocacy office at 517-482-1422 or sean.gehle@ascension.org.

Sincerely,

Donald D. Bignotti, M.D.
Chief Clinical Officer, Ascension Michigan

Cc: Members, Michigan House Education Reform Committee

Cc: Sean Gehle, Chief Advocacy Officer, Ascension Michigan

