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**MEMORANDUM IN OPPOSITION**  
**HB.4425 (Barrett) / HB.4426 (Noble)**

*AN ACT to amend the public health law, in relation to vaccination/immunization exemptions.*

Dear Representative Tim Kelly, Chair, Representative Pamela Hornberger, Vice- Chair and members of Committee on Education Reform:

March of Dimes opposes both these bills which eliminates public health education for parents seeking philosophical child-hood vaccination exemptions.

**Vaccines are a highly effective means of preventing infectious diseases.** In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has declared vaccines to be one of the top 10 public health achievements of the 20th century. Federal and professional guidelines recommend childhood and adolescent immunizations to protect against a wide range of viral and bacterial infections – including polio, measles, mumps, and rubella - whose consequences can include permanent disability or even death.

Polio (short for poliomyelitis, once called infantile paralysis), used to strike thousands of children in the United States each year. Polio was eradicated in the U.S. by 1979 because of landmark national mass Salk and Sabin vaccination programs. Similarly, the measles vaccine became available in 1963, and in 2000, due to widespread vaccination, the US was declared free of endemic measles.

**Exemptions put children at risk from preventable diseases.** As immunization levels have dropped in certain populations in recent decades, some preventable infectious diseases such as the measles have made dramatic comebacks. Some of this trend can be traced back to non-medical vaccine exemptions.

When families refuse or delay vaccinations for their children without a medical basis, they increase the risk of disease for those children and others in the community, especially those who cannot be vaccinated. Some children are too sick (e.g., those with cancer) to be vaccinated. Other children (i.e., newborns) are too young to be vaccinated.

Herd immunity helps to insulate children who cannot be vaccinated against preventable infectious diseases and stops any outbreaks from becoming epidemic. In order for herd immunity to be effective, however, vaccinations must cover a certain percent of the population. For most diseases,

95-99% of eligible persons must be vaccinated to attain herd immunity, so even a relatively small increase in exemptions can put that goal out of reach.

Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicates an increase in non-medical exemptions across the United States. In many communities, vaccination rates are falling below the level needed to achieve herd immunity. The United States, once declared measles free, has seen increasing numbers of cases, with over 600 reported in 2014 alone.

**Childhood vaccines do not cause Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).** In 2004, an Institute of Medicine panel concluded, after reviewing many studies, that neither the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine nor vaccines that contain thimerosal are associated with autism.

The controversial 1998 study that set off concerns about a possible link between the MMR vaccine and ASD was retracted by the medical journal Lancet that originally published it. Parents of children with autism suspected that the MMR vaccine, given around 12 to 15 months of age, contributed to ASD around the time they were vaccinated. Most likely, this is the age when symptoms of the disorder commonly begin, even if a child is not vaccinated.

March of Dimes recognizes the need to continue research into the causes of ASD, HOWEVER creating a philosophical exemption to mandatory immunizations will only facilitate the return of preventable infectious diseases and place children who cannot be vaccinated at increased risk of contracting them.

**For these reasons, March of Dimes OPPOSES these bills and urges legislators to vote AGAINST it.**

*March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency whose volunteers and staff work to improve the health of infants and children by preventing birth defects, premature birth and infant mortality. Founded in 1938, the March of Dimes funds programs of research, community services, education and advocacy. For the latest resources and information, visit [marchofdimes.org](http://marchofdimes.org) or [nacersano.org](http://nacersano.org).*