

TO: William J. Lippert, Chair HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE
FROM: Lake Champlain Waldorf School, Inc., Josh Simonds, Board President
Re: H. 98 - An act relating to reportable disease registries and data
Date: May 11, 2015

The Lake Champlain Waldorf School is celebrating its 30th year. It is Vermont's largest K to 12 independent school. We have over 40 fulltime employees and more than 60 employees overall. Our students come from approximately 200 families and represent Chittenden, Addison, Lamoille, Washington and Franklin Counties as well as New York State. We have exchange students from Germany, Spain, Australia and France as well as students from China and Brazil.

The School faithfully follows Vermont law concerning the collection and reporting of vaccination data and takes no position on the personal health choices of the families of our students. The School's mission is to prepare students to become creative and independent thinkers able to impart purpose and direction to their lives and to meet the world and their fellow human beings with wisdom, courage and compassion. As an approach to education Waldorf has been highly successful in the United States and Canada. In addition to independent Waldorf Schools, several states boast publicly funded Waldorf Schools. Vermont has been a leader in per capita Waldorf education with early education Morning Garden programs too numerous to count and at various times as many as four Waldorf Grade Schools in the State.

It is my understanding that the Committee has requested input on the potential economic impacts which elimination of the Philosophical Exemption to vaccination requirements would cause. For our school because there are a relatively high percentage of families whom have filed Philosophical Exemptions¹ who may see their only alternative as homeschooling, the impact of an immediate elimination of the philosophical exemption will certainly require position cuts and teachers losing their jobs. If we lose as many as 20 percent of our Philosophical Exemption students, it could result in closing the school's doors entirely. If the school is able to remain open, the impact will not just be a single hard year but will cause financial stress for an extended period. Erosion of class sizes in the lower grades carries through during the education cycle. Our school like all Vermont Schools is also dealing with the challenges of demographic changes in the State which already stress the budget. Addition of the immediate elimination of the Philosophical Exemption to that stress may be a final straw.

The School supports as an alternative to the immediate elimination of the Philosophical Exemption, the Amendment to H. 98 now before the Committee. The "Oregon" approach of requiring participation in an education module prior to allowance of a "non-medical exemption," appears to have accomplished higher vaccination rates and increased public health education. Likewise, the graduated compliance allowed in the Amendment may prove a palatable solution for those seeking Philosophical Exemptions whose primary concern is the pacing and schedule of vaccinations. The School also believes that the Amendment will foster an approach to modification of the Philosophical Exemption which will lessen its economic impact on the future of the School and thereby preserve jobs.

Thank you for your consideration.

 5/11/15

¹ Which includes both students who are not on pace with the vaccination schedule by even as little as a single dose as well as completely unvaccinated students.