

Additional Submitted Testimony on H.98, Vaccinations Sections

(Via phone and e-mail, mostly)

[currently being updated—please check back soon –5/11/15, 10:15 AM]

From: Kay Johnson <kay.johnson@johnsongci.com>

Date: February 24, 2015 at 9:13:42 AM EST

To: BillLippert@gmavt.net, wlippert@leg.state.vt.us

Subject: vaccine policy in Vermont - message from Kay

Dear Bill,

I want to share my thoughts with you about Vermont childhood immunization policy. As a constituent, I hope that you will bring a bill before your committee that narrows or eliminated philosophical exemptions. The Governor is wrong on this and the Department of Health has its hands tied. Vermont is one of only 20 states to have three types of exemptions for childhood immunizations. Moreover, CDC reports that Vermont has the second highest rate of non-medical exemptions in the country.

A sensible debate in the legislature will be most fair to Vermont's young children. This is in your hands.

I am writing to you as a national expert on vaccine policy, having served on the National Vaccine Advisory Committee, primary author of a white paper published in JAMA during the measles epidemic of 1990s, testified before Congress in those years, one of the architects of the National Vaccine Program, consultant to CDC to redesign the national immunization survey and registry strategies, adviser to the Office of the Surgeon General (Satcher) on implementation of national vaccine policy, and author of vaccine financing background papers for the Institute of Medicine (IOM). In other words I am well informed about national vaccine policy, the science behind it, and the importance of immunizing children.

A new poll shows that strong majority of Vermont residents support eliminating philosophical exemptions for vaccines. For example, 73% would support a bill to allow medical exemptions only, and 70% do not agree with Governor Shumlin that the exemption policy should be left alone. Leading organizations such as the Vermont Academy of Pediatrics, Academy of Family Physicians, Association of Hospitals, and March of Dimes support the elimination of the philosophical exemption for vaccines in our state.

Some additional facts may help you to consider how to address Vermont's policy needs. As you may know:

- • The vast majority of Vermont family exemptions are philosophical and national studies suggest these are generally parents making decisions based on false information.
- • Among our kindergarten students, 5% of public schools students and 14% of private school students claim at least one exemption. This shows in coverage rates at 86.9% for public and 72.2% for private schools. Vermont DOH said overall 85.8% of kindergarten students entered fully immunized in 2013-14. This does not reach the threshold for the 90% or 95% immunization rates that assure critical herd immunity. Moreover, provisional admissions are on the rise.
- • CDC says only 91.2% of Vermont kindergarteners have a measles vaccination. More than 20 schools had measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) immunization rates below 90% in 2013-14. Those are pockets of vulnerability for measles outbreak.
- • For child care settings (remember the rule is “every child by two,” not by five), Vermont DOH data are for only 60% of facilities and rates were about 90% vaccine coverage. The philosophical and religious exemption rate was reported at 4% for this subsample.

• • The CDC National Immunization survey data for children 19-35 months show that only 67% of Vermont toddlers of that age had received the full series of recommended vaccines. Lower than the national average (70%) and the rates for New England states combined (77%).
Your leadership in the House Health Committee will be critical to giving full voice to the science, expert opinion, and public opinion. I strongly urge you to take up for debate and passage legislation that would modify our current policy on philosophical exemptions. Ideally, the philosophical exemption would be reversed; however, at a minimum, there should be a two-stage process for philosophical exemptions requiring parent education.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance as you consider vaccine policy in Vermont. Try me on my cell 802-578-3161 or via email.

Best regards, Kay

--Kay Johnson
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Dear Representatives Dakin, Buxton, Christie, Dickenson, McCormack, Miller, Poirier, Sullivan, Till, and McLinn,

I am emailing you to show my support for H.212. As a member of a community in which only 43% of us vaccinate our children, I am increasingly concerned with the anti-science mentality that is driving this issue. I am well read on both sides of the vaccine debate, and I find the anti-vaccine research to be seriously flawed in both methodology and interpretation.

To give a brief but illustrative example, the anti-vaxxers claim that measles was on its way out all on its own, and that the introduction of the vaccine did not play any part in this, and is therefore ineffective. However, a close look at the graph they use to make this point references the number of deaths from measles per 100,000, not the number of cases of measles. In other words, we did get better at keeping people with measles alive, but we did not reduce the number of measles cases. Furthermore, the close to zero deaths from measles per 100,000 people still adds up to 400-500 deaths per year, and does not even include those who suffer brain damage or other debilitating effects. That is a lot of children to lose to a disease that is preventable by a vaccine with a 99.999% safety rating.

Every claim the anti-vaxxers make turns out to be a case of misinterpreting the data, considering the data out of context, leaving out other highly relevant information, or blatantly refusing to accept modern science.

As I see it, the bottom line is this: yes, vaccines do carry risks, but the risks associated with the diseases themselves are far more frequent and more severe than those associated with the vaccines.

I am also attaching the draft of an article that I am co-authoring with a local pediatrician. There is much more to be said on the topic, but this article presents the approach of weighing the risks versus the stakes.

Again, I fully support this bill.

Thank you for your hard work and time.

Karen Vatz
East Montpelier

