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STATE OF VERMONT
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND WELFARE

April 24, 2015

Commissioner Harry Chen
Vermont Department of Health
108 Cherry Street
Burlington, VT 05402

Dear Commissioner Chen,

I am writing on behalf of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare (Committee) concerning the ongoing debate in the General Assembly on Vermont's immunization requirements for attendance at schools and child care facilities. During the Committee's hearing this past Wednesday, the following questions arose:

- 1) How and by whom is the decision made in Vermont as to which immunizations are required for entry to schools and child care facilities?
- 2) The Committee heard testimony from Dr. Rebecca Bell, a pediatric critical care physician at the University of Vermont Medical Center, that studies have shown that various education strategies do not work to change individuals' perception of immunization once they have decided that they oppose immunization. In light of this finding, how does the Vermont Department of Health recommend that the State proceed in raising its immunization rate?
- 3) The Committee also heard of a study indicating that philosophical exemption rates declined when obtaining the exemption was more difficult than being immunized. Should this consideration be factored into our future discussions on this topic?
- 4) Were the philosophical exemption to be repealed by the General Assembly, what recommendations can the Department offer for addressing unimmunized students in upper grade levels?
- 5) On what grounds do providers decide to certify a student's medical exemption? Does the Department offer any guidance?
- 6) The Committee also heard that there was a correlation between requiring a physician's signature to receive the philosophical exemption and fewer philosophical exemptions claimed. Is this something the General Assembly should build into its immunization framework?

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this matter. The Committee hopes to receive guidance to these questions at your earliest convenience. If you need any further information or elaboration on our questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Senator Claire Ayer, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare