



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ANDY X. VARGAS

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Hearing Monday for Vargas Bill to Remove Non-Medical Exemption to Childhood Vaccines, Coalition Urges Action

Boston MA – The Joint Committee on Public Health will convene on Monday, July 12th to hear testimony regarding H2411, *An Act relative to vaccines and preventing future disease outbreaks*. The bill would remove the current section of the vaccination law which allows parents to cite “religious” reasons to reject vaccination for kids entering schools. Prior to the pandemic, this bill was filed in response to the rapid increase (5 times the rate of the 1980s) in religious exemptions that have taken place in Massachusetts over the last several decades, resulting in a larger number of unvaccinated children. The bill does **not** apply to the COVID vaccine and only the traditional longstanding childhood vaccines to prevent diseases like measles and polio.

In April, [Connecticut became the latest state](#) to remove religious exemptions for childhood vaccines, joining New York, Maine and other states. Parents of unvaccinated children in the northeast now look to Massachusetts, which has yet to close the religious exemption loophole, posing a threat to immunocompromised populations that rely on others to be vaccinated. A national [CDC study also demonstrated a 50% or higher drop in vaccination rates](#) for school vaccines due to the pandemic forcing missed pediatric appointments.

"Before the pandemic started, multiple immunocompromised constituents and families approached me about the resurgence of measles, which led us to file the bill. I was proud to file it again this session. Massachusetts is home to the best scientific institutions and the fact that New York, Connecticut, Maine and several other states have already stuck with the science and protected immunocompromised populations means that we are overdue to catch-up. Put simply, especially after this pandemic, we should all be motivated to stop preventable outbreaks and loss of life." - **State Representative Andy X. Vargas**

Measles by its extremely contagious nature requires an immunization rate of 90-95 percent to prevent an outbreak. Nearly every county in Massachusetts has at least one school that has not met this threshold.

“Vargas’ bill is a referendum on science and the consensus opinion of modern medical practice and public health. The first priority of any elected official is to ensure public health. We have done this with laws requiring seat belts, car seats, bike helmets, and hands-free cell phone use. After all the passion and rhetoric are filtered out, strengthening vaccination rules are a reflection of our most fundamental responsibilities to protect children and the people who teach them every day.” - **Dr. Jonathan Davis, MD, Tufts Medical Center**

“Most people who claim a religious exemption do not hold a religious belief opposed to childhood vaccines but are rather using a loophole in the current law to claim what is truly a personal belief exemption. This leaves their own children and others with whom they come in contact at risk for contracting a vaccine-preventable illness. It is more important now than ever to pass this bill as we have seen many children miss routine well child visits due to the pandemic, putting them behind in needed immunizations.” - **Dr. Lloyd Fisher, MD, President of the Massachusetts Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics**

“According to my faith tradition, the preservation of health and life is a foundational value, and it is understood to be a communal obligation. People who can’t be vaccinated for medical reasons rely on all of us to create lifesaving herd immunity. For this reason, we support the complete removal of the religious exemption for vaccines in order to protect those in our community who for a legitimate medical reason cannot be vaccinated. We are confident in our tradition's moral call to vaccinate that allows us all to thrive healthily and wholly.” - **Cindy Rowe, Executive Director, Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action**

“Vulnerable populations, such as those with a primary immunodeficiency, rely on herd immunity to protect against infectious diseases. The proposed legislation, ensuring that children who attend schools in Massachusetts are up to date on immunizations, will promote public health and safety for the entire community.” - **Jamie Sexton, Director of State Policy at the Immune Deficiency Foundation**

“Our MA ACP Chapter, which represents more than 4,200 internal medicine physician specialists and medical students in our state, and which is part of the American College of Physicians representing approximately 160,000 members globally, supports H.2411. Our chapter is very concerned about recent surges in vaccine preventable diseases, such as measles. [Data](#) show that just for children born in the United States in 2009, routine childhood immunizations will prevent approximately 42,000 early deaths and 20 million cases of disease with savings of more than \$82 billion in societal costs. Outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases have been linked to communities of unvaccinated and under-vaccinated individuals. Vaccines save lives. We proudly support Rep. Vargas’s bill and urge the Joint Committee on Public Health to favorably report this bill out of committee.” - **Dr. Elisa Choi, MD, FACP, FIDSA, Governor of the MA Chapter of American College of Physicians**

“Never has the importance of vaccination been so apparent, as it has so recently lifted our hardest-hit communities and healthcare providers from the depths of a global pandemic. Now is the time to further empower the adoption of all safe and effective vaccines, especially in our schools. MHA and our members are proud to support this legislation which would protect

children, families, and our most vulnerable patients from needless instances of serious illness due to preventable communicable diseases. We are grateful for Rep. Vargas' leadership on this important public health issue." – **Emily Dulong, Massachusetts Health and Hospital Association Vice President of Government Advocacy and Public Policy**