

May 26 2015

Dear Governor Rauner:

We, the undersigned, are writing to strongly urge you to sign SB1410 into law.

SB1410, which passed both chambers of the Illinois General Assembly with wide margins and bipartisan support, creates a *Certificate of Religious Exemption* for parents/guardians that want to exempt their child from school required vaccines on religious grounds.

SB1410 would NOT remove religious exemptions for parents or legal guardians who object to school required health examinations, screenings or immunizations (or any part thereof) on religious grounds. It does NOT change what constitutes a religious belief. The Certificate would simply detail the grounds for objection by the parent or guardian and the specific immunizations and/or examinations to which they object, as currently required by state statute. The signed certificate would also reflect that the parent or legal guardian understands their school's exclusion policies in the case of a vaccine preventable disease outbreak or exposure.

Additionally, the Certificate must also be signed by the authorized examining health care provider *responsible for the performance of the child's school-required health examination*, confirming that they have provided education to the parent on the benefits of immunization and the health risks to the student and community of the communicable diseases for which immunization is required. The health care provider's signature on the Certificate reflects only that education was given and does not allow a health care provider to determine a religious exemption.

Certificates would be required on the same schedule as school physicals (Kindergarten, 6th and 9th grades) and therefore, would not require any extra visits with a health care provider or added costs to those persons requesting a religious exemption and, SB1410 does not change the ability of children to receive a medical exemption for immunization.

All states and the District of Columbia have immunization requirements for children enrolling in childcare facilities and schools. Illinois, 43 other states and DC allow for exemptions to these requirements due to religious beliefs. Illinois recognizes a person's right to a religious exemption. However, the number of religious exemptions in Illinois have risen at an alarmingly fast pace, from over 5,600 in 2009/2010 to over 13,000 in 2013/2014.

Illinois has had 15 confirmed cases of measles in 2015. This outbreak cost Cook County \$100,000 and the State of Illinois \$50,000. Measles is the greatest vaccine-preventable killer of children in the world today and as recent as 1989-1991, there was a resurgence of measles in the United States that caused 123 deaths and 11,000 hospitalizations.

Studies have shown that states with easily obtained non-medical exemptions have higher rates of pertussis and measles and states with simpler immunization exemption procedures have non-medical exemption rates that are more than twice as high as those states with more complex procedures. We know, by some parents' own admissions, that the religious exemption in Illinois has become a "catch-all" for all parents that want to exclude their children from state- required school immunizations.

SB 1410 preserves a parent's option to exempt their child from immunizations on religious grounds with no extra cost or office visit, but also ensures that such a decision, for all parents seeking a religious exemption, is an informed one and that the parents are aware of the individual and public health risks of choosing not to immunize their child.

If we can lower the rate of religious exemptions even slightly in Illinois, that is less people that can spread dangerous vaccine-preventable diseases to our most vulnerable populations in Illinois: babies that are too young to be immunized (as was the case in Palatine)and the immunocompromised, such as people with cancer.

We thank you for the consideration of our views and again, urge you to sign SB1410.

Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Chicago Department of Public Health
Illinois State Medical Society
Cook County Department of Public Health
EverThrive Illinois
Illinois Academy of Family Physicians
Northern Illinois Public Health Consortium
Illinois Public Health Association
Illinois Association of School Nurses
March of Dimes, Illinois Chapter
Illinois Pharmacist Association
Illinois Osteopathic Medical Society