

February 7, 2022

The Honorable Mark Pearson, Chair
House Health and Human Services and Elderly Affairs Committee
Legislative Office Building Room 205
Concord, NH 03301

Re: New Futures' testimony in opposition to HB 1035, relative to exemptions from school vaccine mandates.

Dear Chair Pearson and Members of the Committee:

New Futures appreciates the opportunity to testify in opposition to **HB 1035, relative to exemptions from school vaccine mandates**. New Futures is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates, educates, and collaborates to improve the health and wellness of all New Hampshire residents. In this role, we work extensively with policy makers, health care providers and communities to improve overall public health and improve health equity across the Granite State.

New Futures supports public health policy measures that decrease illness and disease, including immunizations and programs that ensure equitable and broad distribution of vaccines-especially for children. New Hampshire's vaccine for children program does just that. In New Hampshire, all children through the age of 18 years can receive vaccines at no cost through an innovative program that has been replicated by several other states. By combining general funds, federal funds and contributions from health insurance companies that do business in the state, the Department can purchase enough vaccines to provide every child in the state with all the vaccines recommended in the "Childhood Immunization Schedule, US." The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, the American Academy of Family Physicians and the American Academy of Pediatrics have approved this schedule.¹

HB 1035 is not about the COVID-19 vaccine and whether it should be mandated or not, like many of the bills in front of you this session. HB 1035 is about weakening New Hampshire's very successful childhood vaccination program. Childhood vaccinations is considered one of the Ten Great Public Health Achievements in the United States² because it results in substantial health and cost savings. A 2011 economic analysis indicated that vaccination of each U.S. birth cohort with the current childhood immunization schedule prevents approximately 42,000 deaths and 20 million cases of disease, with net savings of nearly \$14 billion in direct costs and \$69 billion in total societal costs³

New Hampshire has very high vaccination rates and is often ranked in the top three states with the highest vaccination rates in the country.⁴ RSA 141-C:20-c allows for medical and religious exemptions for students. HB 1035 includes a conscientious (also known as philosophical, personal)

¹ <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs/immunization/vfc.html>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6019a5.htm>

³ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24590750/>

⁴ https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/Immunize_b/state/NH

exemption - essentially allowing an easy opt out for a family to not have their child vaccinated before sending them to school. This policy would reverse the progress New Hampshire has made to keep our children healthy and immune from previously eradicated diseases such as mumps, hepatitis, measles, and many other deadly diseases.

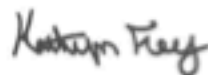
Since 2015, less than 2.5% of children in grades K-12 in NH's public and private schools were granted religious or medical exemptions or considered otherwise not up-to-date on their vaccinations. In other states that allow exemptions for philosophical or non-religious/medical reasons, data has shown significant increases in geographic cluster-based exemption requests and associated increased disease rates in those clusters, especially for childhood illnesses like chickenpox, which can lead to debilitating adult shingles, pertussis, which can be deadly for infected adults who have asthma, and rubella, which can cause devastating birth defects and newborn illness when under protected pregnant people are exposed.⁵

Public health achievements such as vaccines are often a victim of its own success. Because of vaccines, many of us have never seen a child with polio, tetanus, whooping cough, bacterial meningitis, or even chickenpox, or known a friend or family member whose child died of one of these diseases. Childhood vaccines also protect the broader population because they build the protective "firewalls" around us by increasing herd immunity and protecting those who can't get vaccinated, including infants, and children and adults with weakened immune systems.

According to the Infectious Disease Society of America, studies demonstrate that the easier it is to receive an exemption, the higher the rate of exemptions in a particular state. As the number of exemptions increases, the risk of vaccine-preventable disease also increases. Therefore, states should make every effort to minimize the number of its citizens exempted from immunization mandates. Exemptions increase health costs by the need to investigate and control avoidable outbreaks; costs that are paid by state and federal taxpayers—the overwhelming majority of whom have chosen to be vaccinated.⁶

For these reasons, New Futures strongly urges the committee members to vote Inexpedient to Legislate on HB1035.

Sincerely,



Kathryn (Kate) Frey
Vice President of Advocacy

⁵ <https://www.immunize.org/catg.d/p2069.pdf>

⁶ https://www.idsociety.org/globalassets/idsa/policy--advocacy/current_topics_and_issues/immunizations_and_vaccines/statements/062312-idsa-policy-statement-on-state-immunization-mandates.pdf