



To: Alaska State Legislature

Date: March 19, 2014

Re: Support for Senate Bill 169

As a Washington state pediatrician, I have been administering vaccines to my patients since 1997. I am also a long-time advocate of the universal purchase of vaccines by states so that all children and adolescents have access to recommended vaccinations in their medical home without cost or access barriers.

I was vice president of the Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics when our state's universal purchase program was threatened by budget cuts in 2009. Our leadership surveyed members of the WCAAP to see if they had concerns about losing universal purchase. Our members were overwhelmingly concerned that they would not be able to continue providing access to vaccines in their clinics due to new burdens of keeping two separate stocks of vaccines and the financial overhead to start purchasing new private stock. Because of our members' concerns the WCAAP and immunization leaders in our state gathered stakeholders to try to find a solution to save universal purchase. The result of this work was the formation of the Washington Vaccine Association (WVA). The WVA is a nonprofit organization legislated to assess private health insurers for vaccines for the state's privately insured children. The assessments become part of the state's general fund and support the continuation of Washington's universal purchase system so all children continue to have access to vaccines in their medical home.

In my capacity as a pediatrician, a WVA founding board member, and the past president of the Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, I welcome the opportunity to support universal purchase of childhood vaccines for the children of Alaska.

Without state-supplied vaccines for privately insured patients, the average pediatric practice would have to spend \$50,000 to \$100,000 per month to buy vaccines, negotiate new contracts with health plans, and potentially settle for less than full reimbursement. In addition, practices would need to add refrigerators, separate vaccine storage for publicly and privately insured children, and find a way to track their vaccine stock. The degree of administrative complexity, as well as the financial burden this entails would have discouraged many providers from offering vaccinations to children; lacking access to vaccines in their medical home, many parents would simply forgo vaccinations for their children. In our state there is no public health clinic backup option. From our surveys the most rural and isolated regions of our state had the least ability to support access to vaccines if our system did away with universal purchase.

To summarize the benefits of universal purchase in Washington to state-wide pediatricians, clinics, and other providers:

- Providers receive vaccines at no charge from the state Department of Health, affording their patients easy access to critical vaccinations.
- Providers don't have to independently manage supplies for new vaccines or vaccine shortages — all vaccines are available from the state in a timely fashion.
- No cash outlay or additional staff is necessary to acquire vaccines. Providers use the state's online immunization information system to choose their vaccine brand preferences from the full list of childhood vaccines.

In addition to these significant benefits for providers and families, universal purchase of childhood vaccines holds many advantages for the state's public health system, as well as for insurers, health plans, and other payers. Universal purchase benefits Public Health by:

- Preserving the relationship between providers and public health
- Simplifying vaccine ordering and distribution
- Streamlining vaccine management and quality assurance
- Ensuring access to vaccines in children's medical homes

In Washington state, despite the presence of one of the country's most active anti-vaccine contingents, immunization rates have held steady over the last decade — and the cost of these vaccines has remained stable. The percentage of Washington state kindergarteners with complete immunizations has improved steadily since 2009.<sup>1</sup>

Here, the amount health plans contribute to support the universal purchase system is done using a dosage-based assessment. All vaccines recommended by the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) are accessible to all children in a timely fashion, and available in all provider offices regardless of the size of the practice or the remoteness of the practice's location.

Our universal purchase program has allowed us to have a unique public private partnership where we focus on access to all vaccines for children. We have an open formulary and the state does not restrict any vaccines from physicians. We are able to rapidly adjust to shortages as the state supply fluctuates. As a pediatrician in private practice with many Medicaid patients, having less capital outlay has allowed me to invest in more patient services such as care coordination, medical home transformation and purchase of an electronic health record. I firmly believe that if we had lost universal purchase of vaccines our immunization rates would have fallen instead of increased.

I think we were successful because we kept children and their health our focus and we tried to keep the system as simple as possible. Best wishes in your efforts.

Sincerely,



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<sup>1</sup> WA State Dept. of Health, Office of Immunization and Child Profile, see [Kindergarteners with Complete Immunizations for each Vaccine, 2003-04 to 2012-13](#)