



February 25, 2021

Representative Jim Cox
Chair, Labor & Industry Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Capitol Park
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Representative Gerald J. Mullery
Democratic Chair, Labor & Industry Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Capitol Park
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Chairman Cox, Democratic Chairman Mullery, and Members of the Committee,

I am writing today on behalf of the Biotechnology Innovation Organization (BIO) to **oppose HB 262**.

BIO is a national trade association for the biotechnology industry, representing over 1,000 companies and academic institutions involved in the research and development of innovative healthcare, agriculture, industrial, and environmental biotechnology products. BIO members include companies working on vaccines and therapeutics to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Our member companies are committed to rigorous science; the safety of our vaccine and therapeutics is our top priority.

Immunizations are a triumph of public health. Over the past century, high childhood immunization rates have led to millions of lives saved, cases of disease averted, and costs to the health care system saved. FDA approval and CDC recommendations for use of vaccines represent the gold standard; BIO therefore supports the use of vaccines according to FDA's and CDC's guidelines.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the devastating effects of an infectious disease unchecked by a vaccine. Biopharmaceutical companies have worked tirelessly over the past year to find a vaccine to provide the longed-for end to the pandemic, the full opening up of the economy, and a return to everyday activities. While questions from the public about the safety, efficacy, and speed of the COVID-19 vaccine are legitimate and should be addressed, policies that sow doubt in people's minds merely serve as an undue barrier to the end of the pandemic.

Additionally, as a secondary result of the pandemic, Pennsylvania saw routine pediatric immunization rates drop by as much as 70% over the past year.¹ Nationally,

¹ "Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Pediatric Visits and Childhood Immunizations in Pennsylvania." Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, Pennsylvania Immunization Coalition, and



immunization rates for adolescents and adults also fell by as much as 50%.² As we return to our pre-pandemic routines, strong immunization rates are needed to avert outbreaks of other infectious diseases such as measles, pertussis, and influenza on top of COVID-19.

The state legislature should focus on policies that reflect the best scientific evidence to facilitate access to vaccines for those that want to be vaccinated rather than policies that discourage it, especially in the middle of a pandemic. Alternative vaccine policies may include:

- Educational communications or campaigns about the importance of vaccination, including remaining up-to-date on routine immunizations during the pandemic;
- Increasing funding for public health and the immunization infrastructure;
- Lowering Medicaid cost-sharing for vaccines, as Medicaid-enrolled and uninsured adults are the only population that has any cost-sharing requirements for vaccines;
- Improving the state immunization information system (IIS) to ensure interoperability and the ability of all immunizer to report into the system; and
- Expanding scope of practice for different provider types to ensure adults can get vaccines in their communities at their convenience.

BIO and our members welcome the opportunity to discuss strategies for facilitating vaccinations. Please do not hesitate to reach out if we can be a resource.

Sincerely,

/s/

Ben Chandhok
State Government Affairs Director, Eastern Region
Biotechnology Innovation Organization
bchandhok@bio.org

cc: Rep. Eric Davanzo, Secretary
Rep. Kate A. Klunk
Rep. Eric R. Nelson
Rep. Torren C. Ecker
Rep. Barbara Gleim
Rep. Jim Gregory
Rep. Rich Irvin

Pennsylvania Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, September 2020.

<https://www.papartnerships.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Immunizations-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

² Trost, Alexa, Joanna Young et al. "How COVID-19 Has Impacted US Adolescent and Adult Vaccine Utilization." Avalere Health, 1 Feb. 2021. <https://avalere.com/insights/how-covid-19-has-impacted-us-adolescent-and-adult-vaccine-utilization>



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