



WHY WE OPPOSE THE PROPOSED SCHOOL VACCINE BILLS

HB604 "AN
ACT RELATIVE
TO ROUTINE
CHILDHOOD
IMMUNIZATIONS"

HB2151/SB1458
"AN ACT
PROMOTING
COMMUNITY
IMMUNITY"

Parents should not be forced to give their children a vaccine that conflicts with their deeply-held religious beliefs. These two bills would limit or eliminate religious exemptions to school vaccine mandates and would marginalize families who use them. Here is why we oppose these bills.

Religious Exemption Eliminated

HB604 would delete the religious exemption for K – 12th grade students from the current vaccine law, completely eliminating the exemption for students at both public and private schools. This exemption has been part of the MA vaccine statute for decades.

HB2151/SB1458 would keep the exemption, but would require all exemption requests to go through the MA Department of Public Health (DPH). It would also allow DPH to prohibit schools from accepting exemption requests whenever DPH declares a "public health emergency." Additionally, the bill would allow private programs (including daycares, preschools, elementary and secondary schools and colleges) to choose to not accept religious exemptions at all.

Parents should not have to choose between honoring their sincerely held religious beliefs and access to in-school education for their children.

Decreased Accountability and Increased Government Bureaucracy

HB2151/SB1458 would give power to DPH to mandate new vaccines for college students and require DPH to track compliance with all school mandates. All of this would be done by unelected bureaucrats without oversight from the legislature, and Massachusetts government agencies have already shown us how they treat employees who have sincere religious objections to the COVID-19 vaccine.

In addition, these bills would explicitly allow private daycares, preschools, elementary and secondary schools and colleges to require additional vaccines not currently required by the applicable statute or DPH – like the COVID-19 vaccine – officially legalizing a questionable practice that has emerged since the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Schools and Parents Shamed

HB2151/SB1458 would also require schools to regularly report how many students have been vaccinated and how many have claimed exemptions. If a school does not have enough students vaccinated to achieve "herd immunity" for a particular disease, DPH will publicly label it an "elevated risk program" and require it to notify all current and prospective parents about this designation. These requirements apply to public and private schools and colleges alike, and would likely have the greatest impact on small private religious schools. In addition, when requesting a religious exemption, parents would be required to sign a DPH form that states that refusing to immunize is against public health policy and puts their child and others at risk of serious illness or death.

Minors Allowed to Consent to Vaccination

HB2151/SB1458 would allow minors to consent to vaccination without any age requirement or finding by the provider of capacity to consent. This means children could be vaccinated without the parent or guardian's consent or knowledge, and medical records of the vaccination would be kept secret. Parents have the right to be involved in the healthcare decisions of their minor children. Bypassing parental consent to medical care of minor children amounts to egregious government overreach.

In short, if enacted, these vaccine bills would coerce parents into violating their religious beliefs by forcing their children to receive any vaccine that DPH (or their private schools) deems necessary. To the extent they allow medical, but not religious, exemptions, they also discriminate against a small minority of religious families in the Commonwealth. They further undermine parents' unequivocal right to make decisions regarding the medical care of their minor children. Contact your legislator to tell them that you oppose these bills.

Visit mafamilly.org/takeaction to learn how to oppose these bills.