

# American Academy of Pediatrics

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## NYS AAP - Chapter 2

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### **RE: HR 2862: THE VACCINE AWARENESS CAMPAIGN TO CHAMPION IMMUNIZATION NATIONALLY AND ENHANCE SAFETY (VACCINES Act)**

Dear Representative,

As a member of the Legislative Committee of the New York State American Academy of Pediatrics (NYS AAP) - Chapter 2, the Long Island chapter, representing over 1,500 pediatricians across Long Island, **I am writing to request your support and co-sponsorship for reauthorization of HR 2862, The Vaccines Awareness Campaign to Champion Immunization Nationally and Enhance Safety (VACCINES Act).**

The bill would authorize the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to conduct research on vaccine confidence across the country and fund a national public messaging campaign. Specifically, the CDC will track vaccine hesitancy and vaccine coverage rates over time, enabling both the center and physicians to better educate the public about immunization safety and combat vaccine misinformation.

This bipartisan bill, currently co-sponsored by 14 of your colleagues, is vital to the interests of Long Island pediatricians and parents. Vaccination is one of modern medicine's greatest and most cost-effective achievements. In the United States, immunization prevents approximately 43,000 early deaths and saves 13.5 billion dollars in direct costs per birth cohort, with total society costs savings estimated at 68.8 billion (1). Vaccines are considered one of the "Ten Greatest Public Health Achievements," of the last century by the Centers for Disease Control and among the "Seven Greatest Achievements in Pediatric Research," (2, 3).

However absent the constant threat caused by now vaccine-preventable diseases, more parents are choosing to forgo vaccination – impacting immunization coverage rates and eroding population based immunity, which is a key feature of protecting entire communities from disease.

This includes children with cancer and certain autoimmune conditions who medically cannot be immunized, and thus rely on the entire population for their protection. Rates of vaccination hesitancy have become so high that earlier this year, the World Health Organization named it one of the "Top Global Health Threats for 2019" (4).

Nowhere was this better illustrated this year than here in New York – the epicenter of the measles epidemic. Of an estimated 1,022 measles cases nationally, over 800 cases were based in our state (5). The epidemic spread to 26 states and is still ongoing, marking the return of a disease declared endemically eradicated in the year 2000.

As pediatricians, we were on the front lines of this epidemic, diagnosing patients, caring for the hospitalized children who were dehydrated from extremely high fevers, and caring for those patients in intensive care units who developed pneumonia as a complication of measles. Of all the patients with measles cared for at our children's hospital, 30% of them required intensive care units to assist their breathing.

Sadly, all of these cases were preventable. One dose of measles vaccine is 90% effective and receipt of the 2-dose series confers >97% protection. When confidence in vaccination decreases, immunization rates fall and once forgotten diseases, like measles, return. High rates of immunization in the community create "Herd Immunity," which allows the small number of unvaccinated children to remain protected against vaccine-preventable disease in large groups.

If immunization rates decline below 95%, then herd immunity is lost and patients with medical conditions precluding vaccination suffer. One patient, a survivor of childhood leukemia on maintenance chemotherapy, was removed from the last two months of school because vaccination rates were too low and, as a child with cancer, measles could be fatal if contracted. Vaccine hesitancy took away the only normal aspect of childhood for my patient with leukemia – whose parents had to subsequently home school her.

Though measles made headlines this year, it is important to understand that vaccine-preventable diseases have made frequent re-appearances in this "Era of Vaccine Refusal." Cases of pertussis, or whooping cough, have been steadily rising since 2000.

In 2012 there were 48,277 cases of pertussis reported by states, representing the highest number of pertussis cases reported in the United States since 1955 (6). In New York State, the annual rate of pertussis last year was 3.07 per 100,000, roughly equivalent to the national average (7, 8). In 2016, a mumps epidemic occurred on Long Island in Long Beach, and this year, Philadelphia experienced a mumps epidemic near Temple University.

This bill is critical to help pediatricians and public health officials better understand local and regional patterns of vaccine refusal, their association with outbreaks of vaccine-preventable disease and the impact on vaccination rates in high-risk areas such as school and daycare. It will empower the CDC to create targeted public health messaging aimed at the local causes of vaccine refusal and then track these data over time to assess the impact on immunization rates.

Having now experienced the largest measles epidemic in over a quarter century, the measures proposed in this bill are essential to helping prevent another major outbreak. In addition to being supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, over 230 medical, scientific, public health and advocacy groups also support this measure.

It was precisely because vaccines are so safe and effective at preventing disease that, 25 years ago, Congress created the Vaccines for Children program, which provided free vaccines to for all Medicaid-eligible, uninsured and Indian/Alaskan Native children. Passage of that measure was fueled by a

resurgence of measles from 1989-1991, during which 55,000 cases were detected. If we fail to proactively monitor threats of vaccine hesitancy and refusal or become less vigilant, then future epidemics are certain. For these reasons we ask for your strong support of the VACCINES Act.

As pediatricians and experts in vaccination, we are available to speak with you should you have any questions or concerns about this bill. On behalf of over 1,500 pediatricians across Long Island, we thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Shah', with a horizontal line underneath.

Shetal I. Shah, MD, FAAP  
President, NYS AAP - Chapter 2

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6. Klein NP, Bartlett J, Rowhani-Rahbar A, Fireman B, Baxter R. Waning Protection after Fifth Dose of Acellular Pertussis Vaccine in Children. *N Engl J Med* 2012; 367:1012-1019
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8. Centers for Disease Control. 2018 Provisional Pertussis Surveillance Report. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/downloads/pertuss-surv-report-2018-508.pdf> (Accessed 7-15-19)