

To: Members of the Wisconsin State Legislature

Date: August 13, 2015

Re: Do not support 2015 Senate Bill 218

From: Agnesian HealthCare
Aurora Health Care
Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
Columbia St. Mary's
Essentia Health
Gundersen Health System
LeadingAge Wisconsin
Marshfield Clinic Health System
Mayo Clinic Health System
Medical College of Wisconsin
Ministry Health Care
Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin
Prevea Health
Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative

SSM Health Care of Wisconsin
UW Health
Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare
Wisconsin Academy of Family Physicians
WI Association of Local Health Departments and Boards
WI Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Wisconsin Health Care Association/
Wisconsin Center for Assisted Living
Wisconsin Hospital Association
Wisconsin Medical Group Management Association
Wisconsin Medical Society
Wisconsin Nurses Association
Wisconsin Primary Health Care Association
Wisconsin Public Health Association

The above organizations urge you to consider the following facts and upon reading, hope you will decide not to support 2015 Senate Bill 218, which prohibits health providers from requiring flu vaccinations.

To ensure we are doing all we can to protect the health and safety of millions of Wisconsin patients we serve on an annual basis and our employees who need to be healthy to care for them, our organizations require, or support the ability of healthcare providers to implement policies that require, all caregivers receive the annual flu vaccination as a condition of employment, unless they have a recognized medical or religious exemption.

The seasonal flu is a serious disease and people of any age can get it. Infection can result in mild to severe illness and life-threatening complications. In an average year, the seasonal flu causes 36,000 deaths and 226,000 hospitalizations in the United States. The flu is highly contagious. Forty percent of those exposed to the flu will contract the disease. But not all who are infected end up with all the ramifications; some who are otherwise healthy will never know they carry the flu, and therefore pass it on to those who are very vulnerable - particularly the frail elderly and the very young.

Health care workers (HCWs) are vulnerable to influenza virus infection and often serve as potential sources of influenza virus for their patients. Many instances of in-hospital influenza outbreaks have been associated with unvaccinated HCWs. Getting a flu vaccination is one of the most effective ways to help prevent unnecessary deaths and stem the spread of this preventable disease. Vaccinations keep our patients safer. Health care professionals have a responsibility to act in the best interest of our patients.

Vaccination policies are also consistent with the Centers for Disease Control and Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices, which have both called for a universal influenza vaccination position: vaccinating all Americans unless a medical/religious contraindication or children less than 6 months of age, and that HCWs receive vaccinations in order to promote a safe environment for patients and promote a healthy workforce to provide medical care.

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Other national recommendations on influenza vaccinations:

In response to the early phase of the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, the Infectious Diseases Society of America issued a statement supporting both seasonal and H1N1 vaccine mandates by health care institutions to protect patients against transmission of the influenza virus.

In 2009, the National Patient Safety Foundation also issued a position statement supporting mandatory influenza vaccination for HCWs as a means to protect patients, fellow HCWs, and the community.

We respect and care about the well-being of our employees and patients. Vaccination policies are the most effective way to protect both. Thank you for your consideration.