

Office of the Governor
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December 14, 2021

Honorable Lawrence A. "Larry" Bagley
Chairman, House Committee on Health and Welfare
Louisiana House of Representatives
Post Office Box 94062
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Dear Chairman Bagley:

I am in receipt of your December 9, 2021 notice that the House Committee on Health and Welfare has met and found unacceptable the administrative rule proposed by the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) to amend the state immunization schedule provided for in the sanitary code (LAC 51:II.701) to add COVID-19 vaccines to the list of vaccinations required for school and child day care entry. By this letter, I am notifying you that I disapprove of the committee action pursuant to La. R.S. 49:968(G).

First and foremost, I am allowing this rule to go into effect because it will save lives and will help Louisiana to emerge from this pandemic. The facts of this pandemic at this point are crystal clear. As of today, over 770,000 people in Louisiana have tested positive for COVID-19. Tragically, we have lost almost 15,000 people to COVID-19 in the last 22 months. This includes 19 children under 18 years old. By contrast, there have been only 12 significant adverse events related to vaccine administration in Louisiana with zero deaths. By any measure, the COVID-19 vaccines have been a historic success. However, we know that there have been far too many of our friends and neighbors who have yet to be vaccinated. This includes school age children who do have a risk of serious illness and death. By adding the COVID-19 vaccination to the immunization schedule, the Louisiana Department of Health and the State Health Officer are doing exactly as directed and authorized by the Louisiana Legislature pursuant to *La. R.S. 40:4*, *La. R.S. 40:5*, *La. R.S. 40:31.15*, and *La. R.S. 17:170* to protect the health and safety of the people of Louisiana.


Secondly, despite the misleading and conspiratorial rhetoric provided at the House Health and Welfare meeting last week, this rule does not force "experimental shots" on children. The rule explicitly only applies to "vaccines that have been fully approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for the individual's age." At this point, the FDA has only fully approved a vaccine (Pfizer) for those 16 years old and above. Thus, the rule does not currently apply to anyone under the age of 16. It will only apply to those under 16 when, and if, the FDA fully approves a

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vaccine for that age group. Further, pursuant to this rule, no child will be forced to be vaccinated against the will of his or her parents. The rule explicitly provides that any student may be exempted by submitting "a written statement from a physician stating that such vaccination is contraindicated for medical reasons, or the individual or his parent or guardian submits a written dissent." This is the same exemption that has long been in state law and is one of the broadest exemptions in the country.

Lastly, while I understand that any issue around COVID-19, especially those that involve our children, can be divisive, I ask that you and your colleagues work with me to get more people in Louisiana vaccinated. It is worth noting that while many of the diseases on the public health immunization schedule were once both rampant and deadly, they are no longer serious risks for school age children in Louisiana. This is true because almost everyone was vaccinated against these diseases, many as a condition for attending elementary school. One can only imagine where we would be as a state if the same overheated rhetoric from last week's meeting was applied to Polio or Measles. The development of the COVID-19 vaccines in time to help us put this pandemic behind us also requires us to do everything we can to add COVID-19 to the list of diseases that no longer pose a serious threat. This rule does just that, and it should remain in place.

Sincerely,



John Bel Edwards
Governor

cc: Dr. Courtney N. Phillips
Senator Fred H. Mills, Jr.
Catherine S. Brindley
Speaker Clay J. Schexnayder
President Patrick "Page" Cortez