



**Senate Health and Human Services
Texas Medical Association and Texas Pediatric Society
Testimony on Senate Bill 64 by Sen. Jane Nelson
February 26, 2013**

Good afternoon, Madame Chair and members. It is a pleasure to be here today representing more than 47,000 members of the Texas Medical Association (TMA), the Texas Pediatric Society (TPS), and the Texas Academy of Family Physicians (TAFP) in support of Senate Bill 64 by Sen. Jane Nelson. My name is Kimberly Avila Edwards, MD, and I am a pediatrician at the Austin Regional Clinic here in Austin. I am a member of TMA's Council on Science and Public Health and the president of the Texas Pediatric Society.

Vaccine-preventable diseases continue to cause a great deal of unnecessary morbidity and mortality in our communities. Young children are particularly vulnerable, as they experience higher rates of severe illness, hospitalization, and death from these diseases. For example, each year, flu-related complications cause some 20,000 hospitalizations for children less than 5 years old.¹ Pertussis is on the rise in many states, and in Texas, the Department of State Health Services estimated nearly 1,990 cases of pertussis in 2012 up from 961 cases in 2011.² Vaccines are one of the safest, most reliable, and cost-effective ways to prevent these illnesses. In addition to vaccinating our children to protect them against dangerous infectious diseases, our organizations support a strategy known as "cocooning." Cocooning is the practice of protecting children by ensuring all close contacts are adequately immunized and disease-free.

Child care workers play an integral role in our children's lives. The nearly 50,000 child care workers employed in Texas³ are in close contact with our children on a daily basis. We feel that this legislation, which will require licensed child care facilities in the state to create a vaccination policy for their employees, is important to protecting our children's health. The policy is not dictated, but at least centers will consider this important factor when determining the environment for their client children.

Like health care workers, adults working in child care centers are faced with increased exposure to bacteria and viruses. Unvaccinated child care workers also pose a risk to the vulnerable children in their care.

- **Children in child care facilities are at an increased risk for exposure to disease.** In addition to being in close contact with other children and employees, children share toys and other objects that may carry harmful germs. Additionally, they practice less stringent infection control techniques, including hand washing and cough etiquette, so germs are more easily spread in these environments.
- **Because children are often underimmunized, they are more susceptible to disease.** Approximately 90 percent of Texas children have received some immunizations; however,

many are not fully immunized, and only about 71 percent have received the standard series of immunizations by age 19-35 months.⁴ This means younger children are at a higher risk of contracting diseases from each other, and from adults.

- **Children are at risk for more severe disease.** With less-developed immune systems, children are more likely to develop more severe symptoms from vaccine-preventable disease. The risk is particularly high in infants under 6 month of age, because they are too young to be fully vaccinated against serious diseases like the flu.

In addition to raising awareness of the need for vaccination among adults with close contact with children, SB 64 is a step toward improving accountability, strengthening our public health system, and providing parents essential information to help them assess risks for their children and make informed decisions on how best to protect them. We believe this is a balanced and fair approach that does not encroach on anyone's personal liberty but rather encourages the best protection of children. We hope you will support this important legislation. Thank you for your time today.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, January 2013. Accessed online at www.cdc.gov/flu/protect/children.htm.

² Texas Department of State Health Services, January 2012. Accessed online at www.dshs.state.tx.us/IDCU/disease/pertussis/Pertussis-Update-2012.do.c

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Texas Occupational Employment and Wages, May 2010. Accessed online at www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_TX.htm#39-0000. Estimates do not include self-employed workers.

⁴ CDC. National, state, and local area vaccination coverage among children aged 19-35 months — United States, 2009. *MMWR Weekly*. 59(36); 1171-1177.