



**House Public Health Committee
Testimony on Senate Bill 62
Presented by: Jason Terk, MD
April 24, 2013**

Good day, Madame Chair and members of the committee. My name is Jason Terk, and I am a pediatrician in private practice in Keller, Texas. I serve as the Legislative Committee Chair for the Texas Pediatric Society and as the chair of the Texas Medical Association's Council on Science and Public Health. I'm here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 62, on behalf of TMA, TPS, and the Texas Academy of Family Physicians. We'd like to thank Rep. Jodie Laubenberg for working on this important issue.

Meningococcal disease, or bacterial meningitis, is not a common disease. But it's a disease that leads to significant disability and even death of adolescents and young adults. Fortunately, we can now vaccinate young children, adolescents, and young adults to prevent bacterial meningitis. We know it is important to target the vaccine for those most at risk. Doctors see bacterial meningitis as a threat to our student population, particularly those living in a closed quarters, whether in a community or on-campus housing. Communicable disease does not discriminate based on geography or race.

Senate Bill 1107 passed by the 82nd Texas Legislature created numerous challenges for the tens of thousands of young adults seeking admission to a higher education institution. Colleges have also faced challenges in implementing this legislation. We want students vaccinated for bacterial meningitis. We don't want this vaccination requirement to become a barrier for a student enrolling in school.

Though we prefer a stronger process that doesn't promote exemptions, we believe SB 62 provides a reasonable compromise for students seeking an exemption. We feel strongly the Department of State Health Services' (DSHS') exemption process, which is already established, should be the process followed. Only college students should use the exemption process for this vaccination authorized under SB 62. We appreciate that all individuals who seek an exemption must acknowledge they understand the risks and benefits of vaccines. We are glad that new students enrolling for college will be making informed decisions about their vaccination. That probably was not the case in 2011 with 17,000 college exemptions filed. We know the DSHS portal will ensure students are made aware of dangers.

Physicians support SB 62 because it narrows the targeted population to those with the greatest risk of disease. It also establishes a reasonable process for exemptions. Though TMA and TPS did not initiate the original legislation, we have appreciated the opportunity to work with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and DSHS over the interim to find a solution.

I'd like to close by thanking the committee members, especially Representative Laubenberg, for your interest in seeking a rational, workable solution to this issue. We believe SB 62 balances our interest in protecting the public's health while continuing to promote academic opportunities for Texas' students. We look forward to working with the committee, the Higher Education Coordinating Board, and DSHS on the implementation of SB 62.