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My name is Vicky Byrd, MSN, RN. I am a Montana Registered Nurse (RN) of 32 years and the CEO of the Montana Nurses Association (MNA). MNA is the recognized leader and advocate for the professional nurse in Montana. MNA is the nonprofit state professional nurses association representing the voice of nearly 18,000 Registered Nurses (RNs) in Montana including more than 1000 licensed as Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs). MNA is the recognized professional organization, which lobbies for nursing practice issues to protect the practice of professional nurses and also protect the public in all areas of health care. MNA promotes professional development, nursing practice, standards, and education; represents professional nurses; and provides nursing leadership in promoting high quality healthcare, safety, and overall public health.

HB 334 AN ACT REVISING LAWS RELATED TO THE MEDICAL EXEMPTION TO STUDENT IMMUNIZATION REQUIREMENTS; ESTABLISHING REQUIREMENTS FOR MEDICAL EXEMPTION FORMS; ESTABLISHING LIMITATIONS ON EXAMINATION AND USE OF IMMUNIZATION RECORDS

MNA opposes HB 334 for the following reasons:

- MNA continues to support our Public Health Officials (Nurse, Doctors, Epidemiologist, Virologist, Researchers etc.) and their profession as they are the experts and the continued attacks on our public health experts must stop. Everything they do is evidence and best practice based on the most current science, evidence, and data.. To continue to strip our local, county, and state public health departments is practicing medicine, nursing, and public health (just to name a few) without a license or required educational background. By assuming the liability over the experts in the public health profession is mind boggling. This is a profession no different than other healthcare providers and public health experts.
- Health care provider definition should always include physician, physician assistant, and APRNs as it is within their scope of practice to medically sign and defend an immunization declination form whether the child is allergic (or some other severe reaction that makes immunization contraindicated) or has deeply documented religious objection. Their primary healthcare provider is the one educating and advocating for what is the best course of action for their patient.
- This bill sets up useless roadblocks, and makes it more difficult for schools to protect the majority of families who vaccinate versus the minority of families who don't. Montana's current process for allowing exemptions works for Montana families. These exemptions



must be made by a qualified healthcare provider. Let the healthcare providers practice healthcare and schools provide education.

- HB 334 enforcement provision makes it almost impossible for County and State Health Departments to obtain and review immunization records in a timely manner or during a health emergency. It would restrict schools from sharing vaccination information with county health officers, unless county health staff comes to school to physically, impeding continuity of care and safety.
- When we get vaccinated, we aren't just protecting ourselves, but also those around us. The few who are unable to or opt out of certain vaccines depend on the rest of us to get vaccinated and help reduce the spread of disease.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, vaccination continues to be critically important. The pandemic has caused a decline in the number of children receiving routine immunizations, which could lead to an increase in illness and death from preventable childhood diseases. MNA urges that essential immunization and public health services continue, despite the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Immunization is one of modern medicine's greatest success stories, furthermore, immunization prevents deaths every year in all age groups from diseases like diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), influenza and measles. It is one of the most successful and cost-effective public health interventions. (<https://www.who.int/news-room/facts-in-pictures/detail/immunization>).

We must work together to protect ALL Montana children.

Respectfully,

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