

H. 4813: An Act relative to vaccines and preventing future disease outbreaks
A destructive, biased ‘solution’ to a non-existent problem.

This bill would remove the religious exemption to vaccination, denying in-person schooling to children who desperately need it, including those from communities of color and underprivileged backgrounds, and those with special needs. This legislation is driven by discriminatory ideology rather than an evidence-based approach to overall public health. Laws that marginalize children and reinforce bias have no place in the Commonwealth.

1. MA Does Not Have a Vaccination Problem

- a. MA has the highest rates of vaccination and lowest rate of vaccine hesitancy in the country.^{1 2} Our populace is protected.
- b. We have had zero outbreaks of vaccine preventable illness in school-age children in past decade.
- c. Less than 1% of MA families use a religious exemption and rates are the lowest they have been in 10 years. DPH states the majority use the exemption to forgo 1-2 vaccines.
- d. Exemptions have had no correlation with MMR vaccination rates.
- e. Vaccination rates are steady and higher than they were in past decades.³

2. Denying Education Causes Irreparable, Life-long Harm and Promotes Disparity.

- a. Education is critical to achievement, economic stability, and health outcomes.⁴
- b. Lower educational achievement is associated with health disparity and lower life expectancy.^{5 6}
- c. Education promotes health and economic equity.^{7 8}
- d. Loss of access to education is particularly dangerous for the marginalized and those who cannot feasibly or reliably home-school because of systemic disadvantage or high needs.
 - i. People of color
 - ii. Socio-economically disadvantaged
 - iii. Special needs community.
 1. Violates principles of FAPE; Individuals w/ Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

3. The Bill is Discriminatory and Undermines Rights and Equity

- a. This bill demonstrates systemic bias against those with differing religious beliefs.
- b. Children have a right to an education regardless of their or their family’s religious beliefs.
- c. Children are already suffering from learning loss and worsening mental health related to the pandemic—kicking children out of school will only worsen public health, not improve it.

4. Non-discriminatory, Non-biased Alternatives to Promote Vaccine Uptake & Equity Are Feasible

- a. Sub-optimal vaccination rates in a modest subset of schools are overwhelmingly driven by the “gap” population—students with incomplete vaccination records who lack a religious or medical exemption. The religious exemption has little to do with lower rates in these schools, which tend to be located in socio-economically disadvantaged communities and communities of color.³
- b. In the past school year, the 10 schools with lowest rate of MMR vaccination had ZERO religious exemptions.
- c. Recommended: Direct support of school nurses to follow-up with families and pediatricians.
- d. Recommended: Special Commission to study issues of access, equity and hesitancy.

Punitive, coercive measures undermine trust and create backlash.
Support, empathy and education are the keys to healthy communities.

¹ <https://www.nbcboston.com/news/local/massachusetts-has-lowest-vaccine-hesitancy-rate-in-the-u-s/2362121/>

² <https://wallethub.com/edu/states-that-vaccinate-the-most/66237>

³ <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/school-immunizations>

⁴ <https://societyhealth.vcu.edu/work/the-projects/why-education-matters-to-health-exploring-the-causes.html>

⁵ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2372732214549754>

⁶ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/6303de6b-en.pdf?expires=1619366200&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=EF0B91A99776467B608C65891ED3AB25>

⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25995305/>

⁸ <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-031816-044628>