

Memo of Support A. 2371/S. 2994

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy urges the Legislature to pass legislation repealing exemption from vaccination due to religious beliefs.

The Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy is a 148-year-old statewide, nonprofit, policy analysis and advocacy organization working to shape policies to strengthen families and improve health, welfare, and human services for all New Yorkers.

Schuyler Center supports the repeal of subdivision 9 of section 2164 of the public health law, relating to exemption from vaccination due to religious beliefs. The section to be repealed is part of the State Public Health Law relating to vaccination and reads as follows: *This section shall not apply to children whose parent, parents, or guardian hold genuine and sincere religious beliefs which are contrary to the practices herein required, and no certificate shall be required as a prerequisite to such children being admitted or received into school or attending school.*

Immunizations are considered a cornerstone of public health, protecting infants, children, adolescents, and adults from preventable diseases. The Schuyler Center is proud of our history, tracing back to the beginnings of the public health movement at the end of the 1800s; in fact our history recounts early efforts to rid New York of childhood diseases that ravaged families and communities. In the era when our organization was founded, tens of thousands of people – including many young children – died each year from conditions now preventable with vaccines. In 1860, 97% of the fatalities from whooping cough and 45% of the fatalities from small pox were among children under age five. That same year, 1.5% of deaths among children aged five to ten years were from measles and 2% were from whooping cough. Over 7,500 children under age ten that year died from diphtheria.ⁱ

The vaccines that were developed to protect against these diseases changed lives, changed the nature of health care, and improved population and community health. Removing this exemption will ensure that herd immunity in our communities remains strong. Herd immunity is an essential component of disease control throughout the world. An immunized individual is not only protected from the disease, but also cannot pass along the disease to those who are not able to be immunized, such as medically fragile patients or newborns and infants too young to receive immunizations.

By ensuring that there are only medical exemptions from immunizations, as other states have recently done, New York State will be taking a significant step to ensure that all New Yorkers are protected from vaccine preventable diseases.

We urge your support of this legislation for the health of all New Yorkers.

May 3, 2019

ⁱ <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1860/statistics/1860d-10.pdf>