

March 3, 2026

Submitted via email

Speaker Pat Grassley
Iowa House of Representatives
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319

Re: Call to Reject HF 2171

Dear Speaker Grassley:

The Center for Inquiry (CFI) writes to urge the Iowa House of Representatives to vote against HF 2171. **This bill would, shockingly, eliminate Iowa’s vaccination requirements for K–12 students in their entirety.**

CFI is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing science, reason, and secularism in American law and policy. We have numerous supporters in Iowa.

Problematic Elements of the Bill

HF 2171 removes elementary and secondary schools from current Iowa law stating: “A person shall not be enrolled in any licensed child care center or elementary or secondary school in Iowa without evidence of adequate immunizations” against diphtheria, pertussis, tetanus, polio, measles, rubella, hepatitis B, varicella, and meningitis. If HF 2171 were to be enacted, these immunization requirements would only apply to child care centers.

The bill also removes the requirement that a parent, guardian, or legal custodian of a child “who is placing the child under competent private instruction for the first time” shall provide the school with “evidence that the child has had the immunizations required” under current Iowa law.

CFI’s Analysis

CFI opposes this legislation because it would be a public health disaster for the people of Iowa—the constituents of the Iowa House of Representatives. At a time when vaccinations (and public health more broadly) are under attack nationally—including from our own federal government—Iowa’s lawmakers must act to protect their state’s residents, not undermine established science and medicine.

HF 2171 would make Iowa the first state in the country to completely eliminate vaccination requirements for elementary and secondary students. This is an extremely dubious distinction. Vaccines are high among the greatest achievements in modern medicine, and they have saved innumerable lives in this country and in others. Iowa has required school



vaccinations since 1977, which public health experts credit for “sharply reducing outbreaks of measles, mumps, and other infectious diseases.”¹ This is why the Iowa Medical Society, the Iowa chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Iowa Nurses Association, among various medical and professional groups, have strenuously opposed HF 2171.

Any move to enact this legislation would come at a precarious time given the ongoing measles outbreaks in this country. In South Carolina, there were twenty-nine new cases of measles in February, bringing the total number of cases to 876, with 354 people in quarantine and twenty-two in isolation.² **Of those, a staggering 800 cases involve unvaccinated people, sixteen partially vaccinated people, twenty-two vaccinated people, and thirty-eight people with unknown vaccination status.**³ The South Carolina measles outbreak is not only the largest in the United States since measles was declared eliminated in the country, it is a cautionary tale for every other state about what can happen with a highly communicable disease when large segments of the population are unvaccinated or undervaccinated.

In Iowa, there were nine confirmed cases of measles in 2025.⁴ Given that Iowa’s MMR vaccination rate for two-year-olds is only 87 percent,⁵ any further reduction in vaccination rate is highly likely to result in additional cases of vaccine-preventable diseases. To prevent this tragedy, Iowa policymakers should be doing all they can to encourage parents to vaccinate their children, particularly before they enter school.

Data from the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services demonstrates that the percentage of children who received the recommended doses of DTaP, polio, MMR, Hepatitis B, varicella, and PCV by the age of twenty-four months fell to 71.2 percent in 2024.⁶ This figure is down from 74.7 percent in 2018.⁷ Any further slippage will be detrimental to public health in Iowa.

When children are unvaccinated by parental choice, the risk does not stay within the family. It endangers those Iowa students who cannot get vaccinated for medical reasons. Currently, more than 880 students enrolled in Iowa schools are medically exempt from immunization requirements, including those receiving chemotherapy for a cancer diagnosis, those taking certain medications to manage chronic health conditions, and those who are otherwise immunocompromised and cannot get vaccinated.⁸

Given all of the above, it is not surprising that Iowa residents, parents, educators, doctors, and other health care professionals have spoken out in droves in opposition to HF 2171. Jordan Drane of the Iowa School Nurse Organization, a school nurse in Bettendorf, Iowa, states: “School immunization requirements are a proven, effective public health tool that help

¹ www.thegazette.com/health-care-medicine/iowa-gop-lawmakers-move-to-end-school-vaccine-requirements

² <https://dph.sc.gov/news/tuesday-measles-update-dph-reports-29-new-measles-cases-bringing-outbreak-total-876-new-case>

³ *Id.*

⁴ www.iowapublicradio.org/health/2025-12-18/measles-cases-iowa-public-health-polk-county

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ <https://publications.iowa.gov/51785/1/2024%20Childhood%20Immunizations%20Data%20Summary.pdf>

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ www.thegazette.com/health-care-medicine/bill-to-end-child-vaccination-requirements-in-iowa-exposes-divide-2



maintain high vaccination coverage and prevent outbreaks of serious diseases such as measles and pertussis. Eliminating these requirements would put more children at risk and create unnecessary confusion for families and schools.”⁹

Monica Cox from the Benton County Public Health Department likewise opines: **“To end these requirements would be to go backwards in public health.** ... These requirements not only protect the kids that are in school but also the ones they go home to including those who are immunocompromised or too young to vaccinate” (emphasis added).¹⁰

Jane Colavecchi, who served as director of the Iowa Department of Public Health under Governor Tom Vilsack, argues: **“Child immunization practices are one of the most thoroughly studied medical interventions in history.** They’ve been used for decades with hundreds of millions of doses administered worldwide. **The vaccine evidence shows that they are safe, they are highly effective, there [is] absolutely no credible evidence linking their use to autism or other development disorders”** (emphasis added).¹¹

Chaney Yeast, with the Blank Children’s Hospital in Des Moines, states: “This is the bill that scares them the most about children’s health, and I don’t think I’m being dramatic about that. We, in our lifetime, have probably never experienced one of the basic childhood immunization outbreaks.”¹²

The outcry against HF 2171 is both well founded and a clear message to all Iowa legislators who are considering this bill.

Conclusion

For the reasons provided in this testimony, CFI calls on the Iowa House of Representatives to vote against HF 2171. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Azhar Majeed
Director of Government Affairs and Policy

cc:
Representative John H. Wills, Speaker Pro Tempore

⁹ www.kcrg.com/2026/02/05/iowa-house-lawmakers-advance-bill-eliminate-vaccine-requirements-students

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ <https://littlevillagemag.com/bill-forcing-medical-training-programs-to-accommodate-unvaccinated-students-advances>

¹² www.iowapublicradio.org/state-government-news/2026-02-04/iowa-house-lawmakers-advance-bill-to-end-school-vaccine-requirements



Representative Bobby Kaufmann, Majority Leader
Representative Henry Stone, Majority Whip
Representative Brian Meyer, Minority Leader
Representative Sean Bagniewski, Minority Whip
Members, Iowa House of Representatives