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Chair of the Health and Human Services Committee

Minnesota Senate

Re: Opposition to Removing Conscientious Objection Exemption for MMR Vaccine

Dear Committee Members,

I'm a husband and father of three daughters, and have lived in Minnesota for almost 13 years. My wife grew up in southeast MN. We homeschool our children. I'm writing out of concern for SF3439 and the impact it will have on my family being able to practice our religious beliefs.

I strongly oppose the removal of the conscientious objection exemption for the MMR vaccine, contained in SF3439, because it violates fundamental principles of bodily autonomy. Every person has the right to make informed decisions about medical interventions on their own body and those of their children. Mandating a vaccine without allowing sincere conscientious objections forces compliance against personal moral convictions, undermining personal freedom and parental rights in health decisions.

Bodily autonomy is a core human right recognized in ethical and legal traditions. Coercing vaccination disregards the principle that medical treatments must be voluntary, especially when alternatives like careful hygiene, isolation during outbreaks, or other preventive measures can help mitigate risks. Removing exemptions prioritizes state compulsion over individual liberty and it weakens trust in public health.

As a Catholic, my opposition is also deeply rooted in Church teaching on the inviolability of conscience and on the remote cooperation with illicit practices.

My own journey to this understanding began when my eldest daughter suffered a dramatic vaccine reaction that led me to look into the nature and development of vaccines and the morality of their development. I also looked to my Catholic faith as a guide in these matters.

The Catholic Church teaches that individuals must follow their well-formed conscience in moral matters, even in areas like medical decisions. Forcing vaccination overrides this sacred sanctuary of conscience.

Catholic teaching specifically affirms the right to conscientious refusal in vaccine contexts involving distant connections to abortion.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (now Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith) has addressed vaccines developed using cell lines derived from aborted fetuses (as is the case with the rubella component of MMR, using lines like WI-38 and MRC-5). In its 2020 Note on the morality of using some anti-COVID-19 vaccines (building on earlier 2005 and 2008 guidance), the CDF states: "Vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary." It explicitly recognizes that "those who, however, for reasons of conscience, refuse vaccines produced with cell lines from aborted fetuses" have valid moral grounds

for doing so.

I would add too, that there are many vaccines being researched and developed using newer fetal cell lines, and in good conscience, I believe that standing against older developed cell lines is necessary in stopping future aborted fetal cell line development. If we accept this old cell line as too far removed from cooperation with a gravely immoral act then it could be the case with numerous newly deliberately harvest fetal cell lines and there will not be an end to this immoral practice.

The Church distinguishes degrees of cooperation with evil and prioritizes conscience. While the CDF has judged that receiving such vaccines can be morally licit in certain grave circumstances, it does not mandate their use and affirms that conscientious refusal is permissible. In addition, there are conscientious objections, mine included, which rest in the belief that God has given us bodies and immune systems that in general, when provided the nutrition it needs, are sufficient. We don't avoid medical treatments, we just use evidence based information along with our deeply held convictions to make the choices we feel best for our children and ourselves, in line with our love of our God and how we best feel to follow Him.

Removing Minnesota's broad conscientious exemption would deny Catholics and others the ability to act in accord with these teachings on conscious, and effectively coercing participation in something many see as morally problematic, fetal cell derived vaccines, specific situation of the MMR vaccine.

Preserving the conscientious objection exemption respects religious freedom and pluralism.

Minnesota's current law allows parents to opt out based on sincerely held beliefs without requiring detailed justification. Eliminating this for MMR specifically would discriminate against faith-based objections and set a dangerous precedent for overriding conscience in other medical or public health matters. It is especially burdensome to apply such requirements to those of us outside of the public school system, as we have chosen to homeschool to ensure our religious and moral values are instilled in our children and are protected.

I urge the committee to maintain the conscientious objection exemption.

Public health goals advanced dramatically with respect to disease mortality due to cleaner water, air, and nutrition prior to the introduction of vaccines. Targeted measures during outbreaks, without eliminating conscience protections, could be accomplished. Vaccine safety and trust are actually better served by not mandating them. A relaxed approach with openness to choice and a clear discussion of risks and benefits is a better way to achieve public health goals as it builds openness and trust.

Respecting bodily autonomy and religious conscience strengthens society rather than weakening it through coercion.

Thank you for time in reading this. Let's preserve the rights of parents and children to have decision making over their own body, especially given the deeply held religious beliefs that can inform these decisions.

Regards,

Michael Arruda