

Opposition to SF 120

As a cervical cancer survivor and patient advocate, I, Morgan Newman, am compelled to express my strong opposition to SF 120. This bill proposes to limit the ability of minors to consent to vaccinations for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or infections, while still allowing them to consent to other forms of medical care for these conditions. My personal experience with cervical cancer has given me a unique perspective on the importance of preventive care, and I firmly believe that this bill would be a step in the wrong direction.

I speak from experience when I say that the consequences of not receiving the HPV vaccine can be devastating. At the age of 16, I declined the vaccine. At the time, the vaccine was relatively new, and I didn't fully understand its importance. Fast forward to age 24, when I was diagnosed with stage IIIB cervical cancer. The diagnosis was a shock, and the subsequent treatment was grueling. Nearly a year after my initial diagnosis, I faced a recurrence, with the cancer spreading to my lungs. The prognosis was dire, with only a 7-9% chance of achieving remission.

My experience with cervical cancer has had a profound impact on my life. I have lost my fertility, a consequence that I never could have imagined would happen to me. The financial burden of my treatment has been significant, and as a young adult, I have had to navigate the challenges of cancer care while also trying to build and rebuild my life. The lifelong side effects of my treatment are a constant reminder of the importance of preventive care. I am not alone in my experience, and I fear that SF 120 would put other young people at risk of suffering the same fate.

As someone who has been through the trauma of a cancer diagnosis, I believe that it is essential to empower minors to make informed decisions about their health. The HPV vaccine is a proven tool in the prevention of cervical cancer, and it is crucial that we make it accessible to all who need it. By restricting access to this vaccine, SF 120 would be denying minors the opportunity to protect themselves from a potentially life-threatening disease. I urge lawmakers to consider the human cost of this bill and to prioritize the health and well-being of our young people. We must not let fear and misinformation guide our decision-making; instead, we must rely on science and evidence to inform our policies.

So, what does consent have to do with cancer? Everything! Consent is about autonomy, self-determination, and the right to make informed decisions about one's own body and health. When it comes to cancer prevention, consent is crucial. It's about giving individuals, including minors, the power to protect themselves from diseases that can have devastating consequences. By restricting access to the HPV vaccine, SF 120 is not only undermining the autonomy of minors but also putting them at risk of developing a preventable cancer. Consent is not just a moral or ethical issue; it's a matter of life and death.

As we consider the implications of SF 120, it's essential to acknowledge the potential consequences for children who lack access to supportive and present parents or guardians. Many kids rely on their parents to facilitate their healthcare needs, but what about those who

don't have that luxury? Children with parents who are struggling to make ends meet, working multiple jobs, or facing transportation barriers may already be at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing healthcare. By restricting minors' ability to consent to vaccinations, SF 120 may inadvertently exacerbate these existing disparities.

For many families, accessing healthcare is not as simple as making an appointment and showing up. Barriers such as lack of transportation, inflexible work schedules, and limited access to healthcare providers can make it difficult for parents to take their children to the doctor. Additionally, some parents may be struggling with their own health issues, mental health concerns, or substance abuse, which can further limit their ability to prioritize their child's healthcare needs. In these situations, children may fall through the cracks, unintentionally denied the opportunity to receive life-saving vaccinations.

By allowing minors to consent to vaccinations, we can help ensure that all children, regardless of their family situation, have access to the healthcare they need and deserve as lowans. This is particularly important for those who may be at higher risk of falling through the cracks, such as: children in foster care or living with relatives, youth experiencing homelessness or instability, children with parents who are incarcerated or struggling with addiction, and/or minors who are taking care of themselves due to parental absence or neglect.

We can prevent these unintended consequences by prioritizing the health and well-being of all children, regardless of their family situation. By allowing minors to consent to vaccinations, we can: increase access to healthcare for vulnerable populations, reduce health disparities and promote health equity, empower minors to take control of their health and make informed decisions about their well-being, and prevent unnecessary suffering and long-term health consequences. We owe it to ourselves, our children, and our communities to prioritize health and wellness. By doing so, we can prevent unnecessary suffering, reduce the burden on our healthcare system, and create a brighter future for all.