Support SB1410 to improve Immunization rates in Illinois by creating "Certificate of Religious Exemption"

SB1410 makes a change in the existing process by creating a Certificate of Religious Exemption. In addition to detailing the grounds for objection and the specific immunizations and/or examinations to which they object, as currently required by state statute, the signed certificate would also reflect the parent or legal guardian’s understanding of their school’s exclusion policies in the case of a vaccine preventable disease outbreak or exposure.

The Certificate must be signed by the authorized examining health care provider responsible for the performance of the child’s health examination; confirming that they have provided education to the parent on the benefits of immunization and the health risks to the student and to the community of the communicable diseases for which immunization is required.

These recommendations were developed and supported by the Illinois Department of Public Health Illinois Immunization Advisory Committee.

SB1410 would NOT remove religious exemptions for parents or legal guardians who object to school required health examinations, screenings or immunizations (or any part thereof) on religious grounds.

FACTS:
- All states and the District of Columbia (DC) have immunization requirements for children enrolling in childcare facilities and schools. Illinois, 43 other states and DC allow for exemptions to these requirements due to religious beliefs.
- Studies have shown states with easily obtained non-medical exemptions have higher rates of pertussis and measles and states with simpler immunization exemption procedures had non-medical exemption rates that were more than twice as high as those states with more complex procedures.
- The number of religious exemptions in Illinois has risen from over 5600 in 2009/2010 to over 13,000 in 2013/2014. The number of religious exemptions in Illinois has more than doubled in 5 years.
- To date, Illinois has had 15 confirmed cases of measles this year. This outbreak cost Cook County $100,000 and the State of Illinois $50,000.
- Measles is the greatest vaccine-preventable killer of children in the world today. As recent as 1989-1991, there was a resurgence of measles in the United States that caused 123 deaths and 11,000 hospitalizations.

This bill preserves a parent’s option to exempt their child from immunizations, but also ensures that such a decision is an informed one and that the parent is aware of the individual and public health risks of choosing not to immunize their child.

Supporting organizations:
- Illinois Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
- Illinois State Medical Society
- Illinois Academy of Family Physicians
- EverThrive Illinois
- Chicago Dept. of Public Health
- Cook County Dept. of Public Health
- Northern Illinois Public Health Consortium