

Madame Chair, members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Krista Newgent, and I'm testifying today to urge the committee to vote unfavorably on SB 18 which would allow for children under the age of 5 to be vaccinated at a pharmacy.

As a mom of three children and a nurse with a master's in health care administration and policy, I am aware of the stress pharmacists are currently under due to quotas, increasing work demands and needs of the communities they serve. With an ever-shrinking workforce and corporate demands placed on employees with Key Performance Indicators, quotas and additional health care responsibilities, this is a recipe for medication errors and ultimately loss of life for Marylanders. Every time I walk into my local CVS Pharmacy, I see a long line of customers along with very stressed employees working behind the glass. I've witnessed pharmacists having to leave their computers to administer vaccines to adults and the impact that this has on wait times for customers and stress this task seems to have on the employee.

According to an October 2023 article in USA Today entitled *Prescription for Disaster: America's Broken Pharmacy System in Revolt Over Burnout and Errors*, "corporations like CVS, Rite Aid, Walgreens and Walmart have consistently slashed pharmacy staffing levels while simultaneously saddling their frontline workers with a burgeoning list of additional duties". A pharmacist, Bled Tanoë, who quit her job at Walgreen's in August of 2021 due to concerns over unsafe staffing levels and increasing demands on hitting quotas stated, "The incidents of error are multiplied by infinity". USA Today interviewed four dozen current and former retail pharmacists from different chains and the response was unanimous, the "dangerous workload imperils patient safety."

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2023/10/26/pharmacy-chains-dangerous-conditions-medication-errors/71153960007/>

In an interview from Medpage Today's November 2023 issue, Pharmacist Shane Jerminski, PharmD shared that "every time the pharmacist steps away from their normal job -- the job of a pharmacist is to safely and accurately check prescriptions. When you work at a high-volume, or even a medium-volume Walgreens or CVS, you are tasked with filling a lot of prescriptions and making sure those prescriptions are typed accurately and making sure there are no drug interactions. But every time you step away to give a vaccine, to do any of these other ancillary duties that they've added, you introduce the opportunity for a medication error to occur".

<https://www.medpagetoday.com/opinion/faustfiles/107478>

Axios published an article last week on this very issue entitled *Pharmacies are Struggling to Refill their own Ranks* including the "steady drop in applications to pharmacy schools, falling 64% from nearly 100,000 in 2012 to about 36,000 in 2022. The number of graduates from four-year university have also dropped to a 40 year low. Recent walkouts due to increased workload demands".

<https://www.axios.com/2024/02/06/pharmacy-staffing-shortage-burnout>

CNN reported in a December of 2023 publication, *Mistakes at Work Happen. For Pharmacists, It Can End their Career* between 7,000 to 9,000 people die in the United States as a result of a medication error each year, according to a recent National Institutes of Health study. Hundreds of thousands of other patients experience but often do not report an adverse reaction or other medication complications, the study found. The cost of looking after patients with medication-associated errors is more than \$40 billion each year, according to the study”.

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/17/economy/pharmacists-cvs-walgreens-errors/index.html>

According to the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics the central region of Maryland where I reside has a high concentration of pediatricians with a location quotient of 1.80 as compared to the national average. The pharmacist data is a lower location quotient at 1.1.

[https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes291221.htm#\(9\)](https://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes291221.htm#(9))

Finally, it is no secret that pharmacists’ increasing scope of practice including the delivery of vaccines is big business for pharmacies. According to PBA Health, an entrepreneurial pharmacy solutions organization in an article entitled *How to Make Immunizations a Pharmacy Profit Center*, Pharmacist Beverly Schaefer states “if you want to add profit to your bottom line, increase the number of immunizations that you’re doing. Every single immunization that you do adds to your bottom line. There are no exceptions.” With what is known about the current crisis in our community pharmacies both large and small, do we want to put further stress on those delivering care for the sake of profit centers and increasing revenues? CVS Health’s total revenue in 2023 increased to \$357.8 billion, up 10.9% compared with 2022, and fourth quarter sales in the Walgreen’s U.S. health-care division also grew. Walgreens noted in a release that it is “intently focused on accelerating” that segment’s profitability moving forward despite earning that fell short of analysts’ predictions for two consecutive quarters.

<https://www.cnbc.com/2023/10/12/walgreens-wba-earnings-q4-2023.html>

Please consider an unfavorable report for this bill that could cause further harm to the pharmacy profession with untenable workloads and unrealistic job requirements and to Marylanders who depend on pharmacists to accurately and safely dispense medications for their health. The practice of delivering health care, to include vaccines, belongs with our clinicians, both pediatricians and family practice practitioners.

I thank you for your time,

Krista Newgent MHA, MS, BSN