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**Senate President Sweeney Rumored To Usurp Health Committee Votes
to Remove Parental and Religious Rights**

Over forty thousand healthy New Jersey children and college students could be permanently removed from school as a result.

New Jersey, December 11, 2019—Just in time for the holidays, and possibly at the direction of Senate President Stephen Sweeney, New Jersey Democrats are moving to usurp the democratic process to pass a bill that will prohibit residents from forgoing some or all mandatory vaccinations based on their religious beliefs.

The rumor is that Senate President Sweeney plans to replace multiple long-standing members of the Senate Health committee who support religious liberty and support maintaining the religious exemption with Senators who will vote to remove religious liberty and repeal the religious exemption. We hope this rumor is not accurate.

Several long-standing members of the Senate Health Committee have expressed concern with this bill. They have developed an appreciation for the complexities of this issue and have deep concerns for how this will affect the health and education of approximately 40,000 students in New Jersey. Several of the Democratic members of the committee have expressed their concern with S2173/ A3818. They are now “unavailable” for the committee hearing on Thursday. These senators were elected by New Jersey constituents to represent them and protect their civil rights. New Jersey citizens deserve critical thought and political transparency when their civil rights are being discussed and potentially curbed.

If this rumor is accurate, the Senate majority leader has made it clear. This is not about the health of New Jersey students. This is not about the rights of New Jersey children to an education. This is not about a respect for religious rights, or the constitutional separation of Church and State. This is about the government regulating the bodies of its citizens. This is about mandating pharmaceutical drugs from a for-profit companies which hold no liability for their products. This is about removing the religious exemption for mandatory vaccinations at all costs. Passage of a law eliminating religious exemptions for vaccinations will result in approx. 40,000 children being forced to leave school or comply with government-mandated medicine. No contingency plan is in place for parents or the school district to educate these children, many of whom have special needs and IEPs.

The ramifications of government-mandated medicine are far-reaching and extend beyond the complex issue of vaccinations. There are many scenarios to consider when changing laws that will have a significant impact on thousands of people in New Jersey.

On Thursday, December 12, 2019 the Senate Health Committee, chaired by Joseph Vitale, (D19) is scheduled to vote on S2173. These bills seek to remove the religious exemption to mandatory vaccinations in New Jersey. The Senate version is sponsored by Loretta Weinberg (D37) and Joseph Vitale (D19). The Assembly version is sponsored by Assemblyman Conaway (D6) and Mila Jasey (D27).

A3818 was passed through the Assembly Health Committee in April of 2018, during Easter and Passover weekend, as a bill that would “tighten” the religious exemption to vaccinations, not as a bill to remove it entirely. On January 31, 2019 Assemblymen Conaway amended the bill on the Assembly floor to call for complete removal of the exemption. This amendment was made quietly, without announcement or thorough review by the assembly before it was grouped with several other bills and presented for a “voice vote”. This is a common procedure that typically allows for amendments that have been previously discussed in committee to be added to the bills. In this case, the amendments completely changing the character of A3818 had NOT been discussed at the time it passed out of committee. At the time of the amendments the vast majority of the legislature, including the members of the Assembly Health Committee, that had passed the original bill out of committee, were not aware of Assemblyman Conaway’s dramatic changes to the bill. A typical procedure is to have bills that are dramatically changed after passing through a committee to be reheard by the committee. A3818 has not been required to be heard in the Assembly Health Committee again, despite the thousands of school-aged New Jersey citizens and their families who will be affected.

“Thousands of New Jersey parents, physicians, school officials, and grassroots organizations have been calling and meeting with the long-standing members of the Senate Health Committee, said Sue Collins, co-founder of the grassroots, volunteer organization, The New Jersey Coalition for Vaccination Choice ,” “If the rumor is accurate, Senator Sweeney’s actions to suppress opposition in his own party is a slap in the face to these families and the democratic process.”

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If you would like additional information about this topic, or to schedule an interview, please contact: Susan Collins, Co-Founder, The New Jersey Coalition for Vaccination Choice 908.403.4027