

## **PEDS REFLECTIONS PROJECTS 2.25.3029**

### **Ron Sahyouni**

Thank you for tackling the very difficult dilemma of anti-vaccination parents. This is a frustrating and potentially dangerous situation, both to individual patients (as your essay poignantly observes) and to other vulnerable individuals. I agree with you that we must have laws in place (seatbelt laws, immunization and school attendance laws, child abuse/neglect laws etc.) to protect society and individuals from others and themselves. As I'm sure you realize, the law is a blunt instrument and knowing where to draw the line between parental rights and dangerous irresponsibility is an important question. Should we compel all parents to vaccinate their children against the flu? Possibly a bridge too far. In your case, does this child, with a medical condition that makes him vulnerable to dangerous sequelae from a (somewhat) preventable disease deserve legal protection from his parents? Quite possibly, if no other option is available.

My hope always is that dialogue can reduce the number of times legal action must be taken against parents to protect their children (clearly, when parents have crossed the line of physical or persistent emotional abuse, the time for dialogue has passed). With anti-vaccers, searching for common ground (i.e., the wellbeing of the child), showing respect for their efforts to care for their child (even when you disagree with their methods), and listening to their perspective sometimes (especially when parents do not hold extreme and deeply entrenched views) can move the needle. When dialogue stops, so does the possibility of influencing parents.

Thank you for your reflections and honest wrestling with a very challenging topic indeed. Best, Dr. Shapiro