

**O&I Hearing**

**“Putting Kids First, Addressing COVID-19’s Impact on Children.”**

**Opening Statement**

*As Prepared for Delivery*

- Thank you, Madame Chair, for holding this important hearing today. As of September 9<sup>th</sup>, 28.9% of COVID-19 cases were pediatric cases, and there have been 5.3 million pediatric cases since the start of the pandemic according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- Currently, Texas is amongst the highest in the nation for pediatric COVID-19 covid cases. We have hit record breaking case numbers at 50,000 in addition to staffing shortages and limited ICU beds at numerous Texas facilities. This is no longer a virus that only affects adults.
- Despite the increase in pediatric cases, most recently, my office is aware of hospitals that have lost up to 100+ employees due to the vaccine mandate. This is not unique to Texas as healthcare professionals everywhere have been

quitting their jobs over the past few weeks due to the fear of being forced into receiving a vaccine, they do not believe is right for them. This is concerning. We need frontline workers now more than ever to take care of COVID-19 patients, especially children.

- COVID-19 is affecting children everywhere across America. However, children are not only being harmed by the virus itself, but the long-term effects from lockdowns are also presenting serious consequences.
- We have seen an unprecedented increase in behavioral and mental health issues in children over the past year. According to a study published by the CDC, emergency rooms have seen a 24 percent increase in mental health-related visits from children ages 5 to 11 compared to last year, and an increase of emergency visits among older kids at 31 percent.
- While we continue to learn about this virus, it is equally important that we address potential solutions to prevent child

covid cases, hospitalizations, and deaths.

- We know that mandates don't work and often have the opposite effect. Educating and encouraging parents to consult with their doctor has proven to be an effective way to tackle vaccine hesitancy.
- However, there must be additional ways that we can address preventative safety measures within schools to reduce the number of infections, without jeopardizing in-person learning
- All our districts have been hit hard by this virus. This is not a partisan issue. This hearing serves as an opportunity to hear from physicians and experts on how we can improve outcomes in pediatric COVID-19 cases.
- Thank you all for being here today, and I look forward to our discussion.

