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To: House Health and Human Services Committee
Chairman, Representative Jim Morrison

FROM: Cynthia F. Gensheimer

RE: House Bill 2478

DATE: January 28, 2004

As the mother of a child who has asthma and is severely allergic to peanuts, I would like to voice my strong support for House Bill 2478, which could make the difference between life and death to those with severe allergies to certain foods, drugs, and insect stings.

H.B. 2478 would enable children from sixth to twelfth grades to carry their EpiPens and asthma inhalers with them during school and to school-sponsored events, as long as a doctor has written a statement describing the circumstances under which it would be appropriate to administer the medication.

Our daughter, Juliana, is in fifth grade, and she is well aware of how dangerous her situation is. I can attest to the fact that by sixth grade students with asthma or severe allergies would certainly be mature enough to recognize the symptoms that would call for their needing their asthma inhalers or EpiPens.

I'd like to relate to you two very sad anecdotes relating to children with peanut allergies who died because their EpiPens were not readily accessible. Sadly, these were all three children of physicians who should have known to carry EpiPens with them at all times and who were present when their children died. In one case, the child was at a Christmas party and took a bite out of a cookie that contained peanuts. The child was rushed to the hospital but died before epinephrine could be administered. In the other case, which happened just last spring in San Francisco, two parents, both doctors, took their two children to a Vietnamese restaurant. Since both children were allergic to peanuts, the parents asked if the spring rolls contained peanuts. They were told that they didn't, so the children ate the spring rolls, and both of them died, again because their EpiPens were not available.

Because of Juliana's peanut allergy and asthma, we have an EpiPen and asthma inhaler at the nurse's office at her public elementary school. In addition, her teacher

knows of the peanut allergy, and at the beginning of each school year I write a note to all the parents of children in her class telling them of the allergy and asking that when they send in treats that they notify the teacher if any contain peanuts. In fact, just five minutes ago as I was writing this letter, the mother of one of the children in the class called to say she would be making cupcakes for Valentine's Day and ask whether it was okay to use peanut oil. So, we feel comfortable that during the school day that Juliana will be safe.

However, last year Juliana had a scare. She was helping the girl sitting next to her clean up some trail mix that had fallen on the floor. Juliana didn't realize that the trail mix contained peanuts, and as soon as she touched it, she broke out in hives. Luckily, the nurse was in her office, and she was able to administer the appropriate remedy right away, so that Juliana was able to return to her class a short while later.

But what happens when the nurse is absent or away from her desk? Or at a school where statewide budget cuts forced cutbacks in nurses and parents weren't able to pay to retain a full-time nurse? And what happens when Juliana is staying after school for Girl Scouts, science club or athletics and the nurse has gone home for the day? That's when I worry. Juliana knows always to ask about peanuts, but we've had some scary experiences nonetheless. Once a friend was offering her a handful of candy, and Juliana asked whether it contained peanuts. The girl said no, but as soon as Juliana put a piece in her mouth she felt the strange reaction coming on. The bottom line is that accidents will happen, and we all have to be prepared for them.

We have two children who are in college, so I know how much traveling high school students can do for school-sponsored activities. One of our children debated all over Kansas and twice represented the state of Kansas in the national academic decathlon—once in Alaska and once in Texas. The other ran cross country and again traveled regularly to meets. Not to allow teenagers to carry their medication with them when they participate in school-sponsored activities is courting disaster.

EpiPens and Asthma inhalers are not drugs subject to abuse. These are life-saving devices that must be quickly available in case of emergency. By its very nature an emergency is not something that can be predicted with any accuracy. Children old enough to recognize their symptoms and administer their own medicine should have the right to do so. As I said before, this is a matter of life and death.

Thank you for considering my input.
