



September 18, 2013

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D.
Governor

Rita Swan, Ph.D.
President and Co-founder
Children's Healthcare is a Legal Duty

Dear Dr. Swan,

It is my pleasure and honor to congratulate you and thank you today on behalf of the State of Oregon, for your important and honorable work—done mostly alone, against powerful forces—that now protects Oregon's children from crimes committed against them under the guise of religion. Because of you, more than any other person, today all of Oregon's children, regardless of their parents' beliefs, can go to sleep at night feeling safe, and awaken to healthier, happier lives. They are protected, finally, by not just the love of their own parents, but by the laws of this state.

This was not always the case. In 1998, during my first term as Governor, Oregon was one of forty states that let child abusers hide behind religion, and was one of only six states that allowed a religious shield against homicide. Oregon had the most damaging religious shield law in America, and more than seventy children had died in one Oregon City church alone.

Within one year, your work with the Oregon Legislature and the Governor's Office resulted in a law that made massive improvements in Oregon's protection of its children.

Your work, as always, quickly had a ripple effect throughout America, inspiring important changes that you helped guide in the religious shield laws of Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Hawaii, Rhode Island, Delaware, Arizona, Minnesota, and North Carolina.

For the next nine years, there were no credible reports of faith-healing abuse in Oregon. But in 2008, children in an Oregon City church again began to suffer and die. This time, though, our state laws held the perpetrators responsible.

Even so, nothing could bring back the lost lives of three of our state's children — Ava Worthington, Neil Beagley, and David Hickman—or fully relieve the blindness of little Alanya Wyland. These are children that most people in Oregon public life still remember, and that remembrance is due to you.

When these crimes occurred, you left your home and moved here with your husband and colleague Dr. Doug Swan, working once again to ensure that Oregon's laws fully protect our children. In 2011, it was my privilege to sign into law the complete repeal of Oregon's religious shield law. The bill was passed unanimously by both houses of our Legislature, a rare occurrence for an important law, and a remarkable achievement for any law dealing with religion. Oregon progressed from having the worst religious shield law in America to one of only six states that have none at all.

This is a source of great satisfaction and enduring peace of mind to all of us who were involved.

Fifty years ago this summer, President John Kennedy made one of his most heartfelt proclamations when he said, "For in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's futures. And we are all mortal."

Of these most shared human traits, the only one that brings universal joy is our love for our children. The state of Oregon, therefore, thanks you for helping us to manifest this love in a way that will last, generation to generation, long after our children become parents, and their children do, too.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John A. Kitzhaber". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "John" being the most prominent.

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D.
Governor

JAK/sp