



Alachua County Parent Fears Impact of Florida's Push to Remove Vaccine Mandates

Does the state's decision speak to a larger issue?

By: Cristy Dodson

Florida Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo announced on September 3rd that the state will seek to eliminate all vaccine mandates. Ladapo said that this push will be a joint effort between the Florida Department of Health and Governor Ron DeSantis to restore parents' rights.

Despite the administration's reasoning, some parents in the community have been left with very real concerns about public health and the precedent this sets for government influence.

Jill Ranaivoson, the mother of three children in the Alachua County public school system, said this announcement brought up the question of how much the government is influencing local doctors. She asked, "Are they still strongly advocating for this, or do they have to stay quiet?"

While Ladapo has said the state will not be banning vaccinations, he has also reaffirmed that the state has no right to tell residents what to put in their bodies. It is not immediately clear where physicians' recommendations will fall on this spectrum.

Asked who would be impacted by this decision, Jill said, "Definitely the kids whose parents follow the rhetoric of thinking vaccines aren't helpful, their kids might actually get measles or something."

While Ladapo's health department can revoke some of the mandates outright, others – such as those for measles and polio – are included in state law and must be removed by the state legislature.

Ranaivoson maintained her belief that the current exceptions to the vaccine mandate should stand and said, "there's always going to be reasons" for exceptions.

Florida's current school vaccine mandates allow parents to pursue religious and medical exemptions from the requirement. This is already more lenient than some other states' laws, like those in New York and California, which do not allow such exceptions.

Beyond the impact on her own public school-aged children, Ranaivoson's concerns kept circling back to the bigger picture of public health and the precedent this sets for government involvement in medical decision-making.

Those who oppose this move to eliminate vaccine mandates in Florida have also cited concerns for the potential ripple effects. If Florida successfully removes all vaccine mandates – including those enshrined in state law – it would become the first state to do so. Critics fear it may not be the last.

When asked if people in the community should care about this decision, Ranaivoson said: “Well, if we are looking at it as a collectivist society, yes, we should care. We should care about public health of our children and public health of the teachers and everyone. But we don't live in that culture. American culture is very individualistic. So, I personally feel like yes, we should care, but I am sure there are a whole heck of a lot of people who will not.”

Even if some community members don't care about the potential public health implications, they may question the standard this sets for changing long-standing state policies.

