

Good afternoon, I'm Bruce Wingate, Founder of the Protect Idaho Kids Foundation. Since 2009 we have been raising awareness about child abuse prevention and engaging in activities that help make Idaho a safer place for our children. Thank you for being here... especially on one of the coldest days of the year, I thank each and every one of you. I also want to thank all the people who have helped to put this march together.... they worked very hard and it is appreciated. There is one person I want to offer special thanks. Rita Swan. Rita has fought for repeal of religious exemptions throughout the nation for over 30 years. She is my hero and my inspiration to get involved with this issue, thanks Rita for all you've done.

I stand before you today in the midst of 183 symbolic, honorary coffins. You may notice they are small in size. That's because each represents a child who died, a child who had been part of a community that refuses medical care

to its young people. The Idaho legislature is largely to blame, because in the 1970's, it passed laws that allow some parents to deny their children needed medical care.

And so we have cases in which kids die from treatable illnesses, such as diabetes, pneumonia, and infection, because they are denied such common treatments as insulin and antibiotics. For these children, the suffering is unfathomable, because they are also denied palliative care. .

These coffins may be symbolic, but the children whose lives were cut short certainly were not. This is not a religious issue. It is a child protection issue. Session after session, legislators have refused to repeal dangerous religious exemptions claiming that they do not want to infringe on religious freedom. We do not want to infringe on religious freedom either. In fact, we strongly support our state constitution that guarantees the free exercise of religion. Adults should be able to practice religious rituals

that they believe in. However, there is a limit, one that was set by the United States Supreme Court in 1944 when it ruled that adults do not have the right to engage in religious practices that harm young people. In *Prince v. Massachusetts*, the court said parents may make martyrs of themselves, but they cannot make martyrs of their children. None of us knew these children. But think about the children you do know. Your sons. Your daughters. Your grandchildren, nieces, nephews. The students you teach. The young athletes you coach. The kids you babysit. Think about them getting really sick or being in an accident. Imagine if you didn't call 9-1-1, make an appointment for them to see a doctor, or take them to emergency care. And instead, you keep them at home where they suffer in extreme discomfort and pain. Over time, their bodies waste away. That is the reality that these kids went through. One child's death is too many. 183 is disgraceful. To allow this to go on makes people outside of Idaho look at us with

contempt. Legislators, look around. THIS is what religious exemptions have brought to our state. Your predecessors passed these laws. Only you can repeal them. Stop this senseless suffering and dying. Idaho deserves better. The people of Idaho deserve better. And, certainly Idaho's children deserve better. Legislators please do your duty and repeal Idaho's religious exemption laws THIS SESSION. Let's protect ALL Idaho children from medical neglect.

One final note. Some organizations and people I highly admire and respect, said they support our cause, but would not march with us today because of the use of the coffins. Please know, the decision to use them was not made lightly. In the planning stages it was suggested we use pin-wheels or balloons. But pin-wheels are already being used by another organization as their symbol, and balloons are for partying.

We did not march here today to party. These kids died, they are dead. Coffins are perfect to symbolize that. We marched to send a clear message to the legislature that they should stop these deaths. One coffin sends that message. 183 coffins screams that message. We hope the legislature hears the screams from these coffins that say..... "REPEAL BEFORE.... THERE'S ANY MORE". Thank you