

House Bill 559

Sponsor Testimony

Good morning Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Health Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to House Bill 559, which will make changes to the law governing immunization of children enrolled in school, preschool programs, and daycare programs.

House Bill 559 has two changes first is the establishment of a standard form for all school districts to use and requires that a physician or nurse practitioner, physician assistant, pharmacist, or RN working in a health department to sign the form for all required immunizations for school entry into Kindergarten, grades 7 and 12 or a student who transfers from another state. It is our understanding that the Ohio Association of School Nurses would like an amendment to address intra-state cross-district student transfers. This process is already used for state-licensed child care centers and the signature verifies merely that the information contained on the form is medically accurate. Processing of the forms can be handled via e-mail or fax if a parent is not able to visit a provider. Doctors and other providers will not pressure parents about immunization and cannot refuse to sign the form. They will discuss the risks and benefits of immunization; the parents make the final decision. Parents' rights are maintained in this bill. Conversations with a healthcare provider are essential to ensure that parents have all the appropriate medical and scientific information before making health care decisions such as immunizing their child. States that have standardized their process have seen a 35% decrease in opt-outs of vaccines in just one year.

Secondly, House Bill 559 streamlines how data regarding immunizations is handled and reported so public health officials, parents of immunocompromised children, and other stakeholders would know the opt-out percentage rate at each school building. Ohio does not currently have reliable data regarding the number of children who have been exempted from immunization requirements at the school district and school building level. As a result, the ability to efficiently respond to a disease outbreak is jeopardized. Much of this breakdown is due to

inconsistent handling of immunization forms and the transfer of information between school districts, local health departments, and the state. In 2017, my district experienced the loss of two Tuscarawas County residents due to meningitis. These deaths came just before and after the Christmas holiday and were only two weeks apart. The first death was a 14-year-old boy from Port Washington and the second a 45-year-old Sugarcreek woman. Although these cases of bacterial meningitis were different and unrelated, they raised serious concerns about future potential outbreaks.

The 14 year old who died attended Indian Valley High School and the 45-year-old woman was a secretary at Dundee Elementary in the Garaway Local School District and had recently attended service at a large church. Both were in contact with many people. These two incidents, to me, are a warning and a reminder that our school districts need to have accurate up to date records available in the event of a public health crisis. Under House Bill 559 all parents, including those with an immunocompromised child, will have the information about opt-out rates they need to make an informed decision about schools.

What this Bill does not do is:

- It does not impact any current exemptions or mandate any new immunizations.
- It does not in any way change the ability of parents to make decisions regarding whether or not to immunize their child.
- It does not permit a student's vaccine status or any personally identifiable information to be made public.

House Bill 559 has the support of Association of Ohio Health Commissioners, Ohio Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics, Ohio Children's Hospital Association, National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners, Ohio State Medical Association, Academy of Medicine of Cleveland and Northern Ohio, Parents Advocating for Vaccines, and the Ohio Academy of Family Physicians. Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, we ask for your favorable

consideration of this legislation. We thank you for your time and would be happy to address any questions you may have at this time.