

Testimony of Nathaniel Overmire, DO

In Support of House Bill 559

Submitted to the Ohio House Health Committee

May 16, 2018

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Nathaniel Overmire and I am a second-year family medicine resident physician here in Columbus, Ohio. I am originally from the small town of Fostoria. Upon completing residency, I plan to go back to that area to practice full scope primary care - taking care of kids, adolescents, and adults. I have a strong interest in improving our vaccination practices and processes to improve outcomes in our pediatric populations. As a member of the Ohio Academy of Family Physicians Public Policy Committee, I am here on behalf of OAFP to discuss the immunization process improvement bill, which standardizes the opt-out process and strengthens reporting of the immunization opt-outs. OAFP strongly supports HB 559.

Immunizations are not controversial. At all. Listening to the media, you would be forgiven for not understanding vaccines because there is so much contradictory information and controversy surrounding them. Look, I get it when a mother comes to me worried that something bad will happen to her child if she does or doesn't immunize him. I tell her, yes, something bad might happen to him if you don't immunize: it's called measles. But really, there are known risks to vaccinations, small ones like low grade fevers to big ones like anaphylaxis. And just like in any medical procedure, there are risks and benefits. But the risks for vaccines are so low, it's unreal. The risk of an anaphylactic reaction is 1: 1million. If you are that unlucky soul, thankfully, it's reversible and curable. And if she chooses to not vaccinate, some of the viruses and bacteria that vaccines protect against actually kill people. Globally, in 1985, measles killed 1.2 million people. In 2016, it's less than 100,000. And while measles was considered eliminated from the U.S. in 2000 thanks to the highly effective vaccination program, measles remains present and can be brought to the U.S. via travelers; and unvaccinated children can lead to outbreaks, as we have seen recently.

Your kids are not the only ones affected by your decision to immunize. Unvaccinated children put many other children in danger including babies who are too young to get vaccines and children with cancer or who are severely immunocompromised - unable to receive immunizations. And that's why this bill is so important. Immunization opt outs in Ohio have doubled in the last 10 years. Our childhood immunization rates went from the third highest in the nation in 2005 to the 38th in 2016. Around 1 in 10 kindergarten students in Ohio during the 2017-2018 school year did not receive all of their vaccinations.

Ohio does not have reliable data regarding the number of children who have been exempted

from immunization requirements at the school district and school building level. Wouldn't you feel safer as a parent, sending your child who has an immunodeficiency, to a school that you know has a 99.9% vaccination rate vs a school down the street with 80% vaccination rate? This bill will streamline how data regarding immunizations are handled and reported, so public health officials, parents of immunodeficient children, and other stakeholders will know a school building's immunization rate. How does the bill accomplish this? By standardizing the form for all school districts to use and requiring that a licensed healthcare provider sign the form for all required immunizations for kindergarten, school entry, and grades 7 and 12. Having a conversation with a clinician is essential to ensure parents have all the appropriate medical information prior to making healthcare related decisions, regardless if they choose to vaccinate their child or opt-out. This verbal conversation allows parents to ask questions and review their child's needs. Simply having the ability to review a handout is not enough. It's important to note that this bill makes zero changes in the ability of parents to choose whether or not to vaccinate - they continue to choose what they want to do, but after having a conversation with a trusted health care professional. And no one is talking about disclosing personal vaccine status, only reporting the data as a percentage by school building.

I hope you will join me, along the numerous organizations such as the Ohio Association of School Nurses, Ohio State Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Obstetricians/Gynecologists and Ohio Academy of Family Physicians, and others, in supporting this piece of legislation. States that have standardized their process have seen a 35% decrease in opt-outs of vaccines in just one year. Please help to boost our immunization rates. Immunizations are one of the most significant healthcare achievements in history. They are safe and effective. Please help us continue to push forward with the knowledge we need to keep our children safe and healthy. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions that you might have. Otherwise, please reach me at nate.overmire@ohiohealth.com for further follow-up. Thanks again.

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