

House Bill No. 559
Opponent Testimony

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Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and Distinguished Members of the Health Committee:

My name is Dr. Janet Levatin, and I have been a pediatrician since 1982. I have been board-certified in pediatrics, by the American Board of Pediatrics, since 1989, including 3 renewals of my certification in 1995, 2001, and most recently in 2013. I provide these credentials to let you know that I have been fully educated in conventional pediatrics and have continuously met a nationally recognized standard of knowledge in my profession for the last 29 years.

My medical education contained very little content on vaccines so I have taken the effort to inform myself comprehensively in this area. I have spent many hours educating myself, going well beyond what is covered in standard medical education, which is, in my opinion, extremely inadequate in this area.

I have a number of concerns about HB 559. My main concern, and the one I will focus on in this testimony, is the "informing" requirement. The bill states that a parent or guardian declining vaccines for "reasons of conscience, including religious convictions," must be informed by the person responsible for administering immunizations to the child -- be that a "physician, physician assistant, advanced practice registered nurse, registered nurse employed by a local health department, or pharmacist" -- about "the risks and benefits of immunization" and "the health risks presented to the child and community by the one or more diseases" for which the vaccine(s) is (are) being declined.

My main concern about this requirement is that the vast majority of professionals who would be doing this "informing" will themselves be woefully under-informed and uneducated on the risks. I believe they will also be automatically biased in favor of promoting vaccines and will not provide balanced information.

Will these professionals have read the vaccine package inserts detailing the various side effects and contraindications? Will they be aware that vaccines contain ingredients that are known carcinogens? Will they be aware that vaccines have not been adequately studied in the sense that true placebos are not used in the development of vaccines? Will they be aware that no studies have been done on the use of multiple vaccines being administered at once (anywhere from 2 to 9 or more at a time)? Will they know that several vaccines, such as pertussis, measles, mumps, rubella, influenza, and

varicella can cause people to “shed” the organisms for a time after administration, causing them to be more likely to infect others?

Will these “informers” know that vaccines have been deemed by the Supreme Court to be “unavoidably unsafe,” meaning that a certain percentage of people will have side effects, up to and including death? Will they know that the pharmaceutical companies who manufacture vaccines and the professionals who administer them are not legally liable for any negative consequences that occur after a child is administered a vaccine or vaccines? Will they know about, or will they have ever used the federal Vaccine Adverse Events Reporting System for reporting adverse events that occur after the administration of vaccines?

Unless the professionals who administer vaccines know all of these facts, and more, it is my opinion that they will be inadequately prepared to “inform” anyone on the risks and benefits of vaccines. Will true, comprehensive education be provided by these individuals? I believe that in the majority of cases, it will not.

I believe instead that there should be a requirement to provide detailed information to, and obtain freely-given informed consent from parents who are choosing to vaccinate. This is how I have always conducted my medical practice. Before any type of procedure, I have always fully informed a child’s parents about the pros and cons and helped them contemplate the decision. If someone chooses to decline an elective procedure, there is less of a need for them to be informed. Vaccination is, after all, by its very nature, a set of elective procedures. Vaccines do not need to be given at any specific point in time; indeed, they do not *need* to be given at all. Vaccination is a set of procedures that should be freely accepted or declined after accurate and thorough information has been provided.

If people choosing to decline vaccines for their children request information about that choice, it is appropriate for professionals to share their points of view. Those not seeking this type of information, however, should not have it forced on them in an appointment that may cost money, may involve inaccurate or incomplete information, and may involve coercive tactics.

I urge the committee to reject HB 559 as it is written and to consider alternative legislation that would promote more freedom of choice for our citizens... not less. For example, we could use a mandate that schools and school districts must inform parents that vaccine exemptions exist at the same time they inform them of the state vaccine “requirements.” As citizens of the great state of Ohio, we deserve to have our freedoms championed and upheld by our legislators, not attacked and diminished.

Respectfully submitted,
Janet Levatin, MD