

Testimony of Laurel Ljubi

Ohio House Health Committee

Re: House Bill 559

Opposition to proposed changes to immunization exemptions and tracking processes

May 23, 2018

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and honorable members of the Health Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to provide opponent testimony for House Bill 559. My name is Laurel Ljubi. I obtained a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology and a Master's degree in Environmental Science. Like you, I work for the citizens of Ohio by protecting the drinking water of Northeast Ohio through the regulation of public water systems.

I would consider myself an expert witness in the area of my two children. I know their personalities, their likes, their dislikes, how to make them smile, comfort them, how they act before they get sick, so many little intricacies about each of them. And when there is something I do not know, or have an answer to, I go to somebody whom I choose and I trust. As parents we have this monumental task of growing healthy children, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Who we decide to share our children's information with is a very personal and an intimate relationship. For my children, I have assembled a team of healthcare professionals which includes a naturopath and a chiropractor. Both of which I must pay out of pocket to go to, but I do this because I feel it is in the best interest of my children's health, and to ensure that we get the *attention and personalized care* that my children deserve.

My main objection to House Bill 559 is the requirement that the parent must have a health care professional sign off on a religious exemption. It is my understanding that both a chiropractor and a naturopath would not fall under this definition. Of course, I would still be permitted to see our family chiropractor, or naturopath, at our own expense; but then would have to make an additional trip to see an approved "vaccine administration professional". This person will have never seen my child, know nothing about the health history of my child, and will know absolutely nothing about the religious or spiritual development of my child. It seems that the only reason to have this consultation is to talk a parent out of

their religious objection. This bill also assumes that parents submitting an exemption did not look into the risks and benefits of vaccines, when this, in most cases couldn't be farther from the truth.

An additional concern I have with HB559 is that vaccination rates will be posted on school district websites and the Ohio Department of Health website, specifically indicating which exemptions were of religious or philosophical nature. This, in no way is an illustration of health of the children attending that school, and can lead to pinning parents against one another, bullying, out casting, and discrimination against children who might ultimately be suspected of not having a certain vaccine or vaccines. I know first-hand how scary it can be having an immunocompromised family member, as my own sister had stage 4 cancer. During this time, my family and I were extremely cognizant and aware that taking my sister anywhere presented risks, since there are many more bacteria and viruses that can cause health issues in the immunocompromised than we have vaccines for.

According to Bethell et al, a 2011 article in Academic Pediatrics, 43% of US children are reported to have at least 1 of the 20 chronic health conditions assessed. This number increases to 54% when overweight, obesity and developmental delays are included. Additionally, 19% of children in the United States have 1 or more of these ongoing health conditions. When our children are faced with such dismal odds, it is imperative that parents are able to choose who they discuss their children's healthcare with, and to send their children to school without the risk of discrimination or bullying. In times like these, it does not appear to me that the issue is too few patients having a conversation with their doctor to discuss vaccine concerns, as was previously stated last week in testimony given by American Academy of Pediatrics, Ohio Chapter. It appears that the issue is that doctors are not listening to their patients, and instead of addressing patients concerns, more laws are being introduced to place more on the parent's instead of on the medical community.

Thank you for listening to my testimony, and I welcome any questions.

References

Bethell, et al. (2011). Academic Pediatrics
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