



Greene County Public Health

Melissa Howell MS, MBA, MPH, RN, RS, Health Commissioner

Kevin L. Sharrett, MD, Medical Director

Opponent Testimony

Melissa Howell, MS, MBA, MPH, RN, RS

Health Commissioner, Greene County Public Health

Chairman Stein, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and members of the House Commerce and labor Committee:

My testimony is in opposition to HB 435 due to the negative impact it will have on successful vaccination efforts in universities, businesses, and schools. Greene County's population is vulnerable to disease outbreaks due to international and domestic travel to locations such as Wright Patterson Air Force Base and nine universities. Our universities include schools of medicine, nursing, pharmacy, business, arts, theology, social sciences, education, engineering, research, and technology. Greene County is home to two Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Ohio. Most of the schools offer on campus housing which contributed to five universities having large numbers of students and staff ill with Covid-19 and subsequent spread into the larger community last year.

Beginning in December 2021, the universities partnered with public and private vaccine providers to offer the highly effective and safe vaccine for Covid-19. In 2021, vaccination has been useful in minimizing cases at universities in Greene County. Last year, one of the local universities had 258 persons ill with Covid-19; this year the same university has had 12 persons ill because staff and students availed themselves of vaccination. Access to the vaccine allowed students to serve in hospitals, pharmacies, and vaccine clinics across the west central region of Ohio throughout 2021. The universities have demonstrated their concern for staff, students, and the community at large by protecting Ohioans through vaccination. Encouraging vaccination, improved medical treatment and qualified public health management of the pandemic will bring Covid-19 to resolution; therefore, legitimate exemptions should be limited.

Finally, research studies document significant difference in life expectancy, health outcomes and standard of living in States using preemption/devolution strategies in comparison to States allowing employers and other lower levels of authority to act quickly to improve health and safety regulations for people in a work or university setting. Schools and businesses can act quickly to protect the health and safety of the people experiencing a disease outbreak and therefore are more likely to adopt meaningful health protections rather than weaken or halt progress on efforts like a successful vaccination effort at a university.