



**Ohio Association of Community Health Centers  
House Commerce and Labor Committee  
Testimony on House Bill 435**

Chairman Stein, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan and Members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written opponent testimony on House Bill 435. My name is Dana Vallangeon, MD. I am dually board certified in Family Medicine and Addiction Medicine and a former health center CEO and staff physician for over 17 years. In addition, I was a medical director at a free clinic and at a substance use disorder/mental health treatment facility, along with an ongoing role as adjunct medical school and Family Medicine residency faculty. Currently I am the Chief Medical Officer for the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers (OACHC).

The Ohio Association of Community Health Centers (OACHC) supports all of Ohio's 57 Federally Qualified Health Centers and FQHC Look-Alikes (more commonly referred to as Community Health Centers, or CHCs), providing care to more than 854,000 Ohioans across 430+ healthcare delivery sites spread throughout 75 of Ohio's 88 counties. Community Health Centers are non-profit health care providers that deliver affordable, quality comprehensive primary care to medically underserved populations, regardless of insurance status.

Health center patients are among the nation's most vulnerable populations – people who are isolated from traditional forms of medical care because of where they live, who they are, the language they speak, and their higher levels of complex health care needs. Ohio's Community Health Centers have been, and continue to be, at the front lines protecting and providing health care to their patients, staff, and communities.

Everyday, Ohio's Community Health Centers see the challenges COVID-19 and the recent Delta surge bring to the health care system from a declining workforce, higher infection rates, increased demand for testing, PPE, treatments, and access to care. During these challenging times, it is important to utilize all mitigation strategies. One proven strategy to combat vaccine preventable diseases is the current vaccination law, which allows for protection and when necessary, exemptions.

Community Health Centers work closely with public health agencies and private partners to improve and sustain immunization coverage and to monitor the safety of vaccines. Vaccine-preventable disease levels are at or near record lows. This is due to the ongoing improvement in the technology of vaccines but also the universal nature of the adoption of the vaccinations. Ohio's vaccination laws include vaccination requirements for children in public and private schools and daycare settings, college/university students, and healthcare workers and patients in certain facilities. At the same time, Ohio's current law allows for personal choice and for vaccine refusal due to medical, religious, or philosophical beliefs and is already more lenient than other states. The exemptions are in place today, therefore this legislation is not necessary and broadening these exemptions will only hinder the health of Ohio citizens.

In summary, as Ohio struggles to gain control over the Delta surge, HB 435 will further endanger and cause severe disruption to our state's health, economy, and remove a vital tool to protect Ohio's workforce, patients, and communities. As both a practicing provider and the CMO of the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers, I strongly oppose HB 435 and respectfully ask that it be overwhelmingly rejected. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration of these issues.