



Dr. Rob McGregor, MD
Chief Medical Officer, Akron Children's Hospital
Opponent Testimony, Ohio House Bill 435 (HB 435)
Ohio House Commerce and Labor Committee
October 7, 2021

Chairman Stein, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and members of the House Commerce and Labor Committee, my name is Dr. Rob McGregor, and I am the Chief Medical Officer at Akron Children's Hospital and have served as the hospital incident command system (HICS) co-commander for the past 20+ months: I also practice as a pediatric hospitalist when performing clinical duties. Thank you for the opportunity to express our hospital's opposition to Ohio House Bill 435 (HB 435).

Akron Children's Hospital has always been fully committed to ensuring that we, and all health care providers, are able to provide safe and effective health care services to the patients and families we are privileged to serve. This commitment extends to our widely collaborative efforts to ensure patient safety within our facilities, and through clinical interactions in communities where patients and their families, including many of your constituents, are as safe as possible. The provisions outlined in HB 435, although directly exempting children's hospitals, compromises the commitment that our organization, as well as other mission-driven organizations throughout Ohio make on behalf of our patients and communities.

To date, nearly 23,000 of the approximately 703,000 U.S. deaths from COVID-19 have occurred in Ohio, and the latest surge in cases has shown us all that now is not the time to let our guard down in fighting this pandemic. With the Delta variant causing widespread infection, and a troubling uptick in pediatric cases, we must do everything we can to protect ourselves, our coworkers and the vulnerable children who have proven to be at elevated risk for this disease, many of whom are not yet eligible for vaccination.

HB 435 specifically outlines a series of exemptions to vaccine mandates with a focus on the best weapon we have in the fight to end this pandemic, which is the COVID-19 vaccine. Akron Children's has, like many other organizations, modified our conditions of employment to both increase vaccination rates of employees and decrease the spread of COVID-19 among our staff and patient population - including those who are medically vulnerable or immunocompromised. Soon all Akron Children's employees and new hires will be required to get the COVID-19 vaccine or accept at minimum weekly COVID-19 testing.

As one of the largest pediatric health care delivery systems and employers in Ohio, Akron Children's Hospital is committed to doing everything possible to work toward an end of this pandemic. After reviewing this legislation, it is clear that HB 435 is a detriment to the efforts of entities across Ohio to mitigate disease within facilities and among staff, and most concerning to us, it puts patient and vulnerable populations at increased risk of contracting COVID-19. Not only does HB 435 lay the foundation of compromising patient safety, it elevates the risks associated with the spread of COVID-19, increasing the risk of additional, perhaps more virulent, variants through further transmission.

Finally, HB 435 gives no regard to the rights of employers in the same reckless manner outlined by HB 248, the "Vaccine Choice and Anti-Discrimination Act". I respectfully request that this committee not advance Ohio House Bill 435 (HB 435). Thank you for the opportunity to share Akron Children's perspective.