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Opponent Testimony on HB 435
House Commerce and Labor Committee
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Chairman Stein, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written opponent testimony on House Bill 435.

My name is Claudia Y.W. Herrold and I am the Chief Communications and Public Policy Officer at Philanthropy Ohio, a statewide membership association that provides the network, tools and knowledge to help people engaged in philanthropy become more effective partners for change in their communities. Philanthropy Ohio has over 200 member organizations, whose assets total about \$50 billion and who contribute more than \$4 billion annually to thousands of nonprofits. In the public health area, Ohio foundations invest more than \$250 million a year for many purposes, including expanding access to medical coverage, addressing infant mortality, decreasing opioid overdose deaths and improving the health and wellness of all Ohioans – including during the current COVID-19 pandemic that threatens our health status.

Over the course of the pandemic, philanthropic organizations have worked with government and community partners to address the impacts of the pandemic – not only on the health of residents but also the economic and educational impacts – by creating over 100 COVID-19 relief and recovery funds that have awarded tens of millions that have helped hundreds of thousands of our neighbors who have suffered from the pandemic. Philanthropy cares – as do the thousands of Ohioans who have donated to such funds, including more than 20,000 just to one community foundation – and has worked tirelessly over the last 18 months on relief efforts.

This summer, in the face of low uptake of vaccines, some philanthropies turned their attention to promoting vaccination efforts in their local communities. For example, a major effort by Cleveland funders in collaboration with other public and private actors aims at increasing the vaccination rate in vaccine-hesitant communities through a communication campaign playing throughout social and local media outlets. Through billboards, tv commercials and other communications channels the campaign is a grassroots – and effective – campaign to increase vaccination rates in Cuyahoga County.

All of these actions and Philanthropy Ohio and its members' collective focus on policies to improve the health and wellness of the state's residents leads us to today's testimony that opposes HB 435, which if passed as currently written would have tremendous negative impacts on the health of Ohioans as the Delta variant – and others yet to come – continue to wreak havoc among our most vulnerable populations: the immunocompromised, those suffering from serious illnesses and the elderly as well as those young students not yet able to be vaccinated. The General Assembly should not tie the hands of schools in their efforts to keep children healthy and in school – where the best learning takes place for most of our students.

We also oppose the proposed legislation because we feel that local districts and schools – not the legislature -- are the best ones to decide what actions they should take to assure that



students can stay healthy and engaged in their learning journeys. Rising case numbers among our K-12 students have led to thousands of students being quarantined for days on end, without access to any distance learning, and this bill, if enacted, puts more children at risk.

The same principle of “hands off, GA” applies to other entities that would be regulated if this bill passes. Ohio’s companies have been hit hard over the last 18 months, and as we head to recovery, they should not be kept from implementing the procedures and practices best able to keep their workforce safe and at work. Business owners should keep their right to make these decisions, evaluating their own circumstances and conditions and making their own choices.

Finally, we question the need for such legislation as there already exists in Ohio law an exemption from any vaccination, an exemption that we feel is sufficient for those who object to the current COVID-19 vaccines.

As Ohio continues to forge its way through the pandemic and toward recovery, we urge you to oppose any and all anti-vaccination legislation that would disrupt efforts to protect the health and well-being of Ohioans, both economically and physically. We appreciate your leadership during this unprecedented time and we stand ready to assist you and your colleagues in identifying sustainable solutions that will continue Ohio on a path to public health and economic recovery for all.