

Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and Honorable Members of the Health Committee. My name is Ashton Steele and I am a high school junior. I would like to provide proponent testimony for HB 248 for the simple fact that I am guaranteed freedoms and choices as written in our US Constitution and no state nor federal government can override them.

There is so much talk about the vaccine at work, in school, everywhere I go. Do you have it? Are you getting it? School is especially vicious. It's such a hot topic and it's now normal to ask people if they've gotten their shot. Those who are asked typically have and they are ok with being asked. A few dare to ask me. I say a flat no. Never. And the thing is, everyone near me then asks why and looks at me like I'm setting out to 'kill their grandma' and their dream of normalcy. I've even gotten asked by my coworkers. Once I was working with two people a few years older than me and somehow we talked about the vaccine. I said I was not getting it nor did I need it. The girl proceeded to ask me if I had gotten my shots as a little kid as if I'm an abomination who opposes vaccines in their entirety.

Where I work, the employee mask mandate was lifted, as well as if the customers had 'gotten their shots'. The employee lift most likely came with the 'you must be vaccinated' caveat, but I refused to be discriminated against by my coworkers. Just yesterday, that same girl started her shift as other employees were ending theirs. I still had an hour to work with her. I was helping a customer as the others were informing her of the mandate and how the customers could take theirs off. The girl said, "Well I know Ashton hasn't had hers." Word for word. Are. You. Kidding. Me? So now it is ok for a stranger to discuss MY 'vaccine status' with other relative strangers?

Why is this mindset allowed to happen? Has my power of consent to medical treatment just disappeared? Since when is it acceptable to talk about my medical history with such a blasé attitude and in the open?

With senior year less than a week and a summer away, I am starting to research colleges I might want to attend. Instead of my previous criteria of how good are their programs and how expensive they are, I now have to make sure I don't need the COVID vaccine and I can actually attend in-person classes. This is crazy.

In addition, now there is talk in many places that only those with the vaccine will be able to return to a real normal and the abominations like me and my family who will not get it have to stay living in this half-life full of forced fear and suffocation. Schools, jobs, college, events, anything that makes life will return to a place of segregation where those who got vaccinated are praised and allowed to live and those who aren't can't live. I thought we got rid of segregation after the Civil War. Call it protection or whatever you want, but it is what it is.

I need this bill to pass. If you listen to one thing, hear that I want to go to the best college I can without being shunned or discriminated against because I am not willing to risk my life or my future on an experimental drug that frankly has done more harm than good. The students strong enough to withstand intentional peer pressure and this social acceptance of great harm to healthy people need HB 248 to ensure that they may have all the choices afforded to them as the students two years prior to them.

For further justification on why I am choosing not to take this drug and why I believe it has done more harm than good, here are some examples of the real consequences:

The coworker who asked me if I'm an anti-vaxxer is a young college student. She received her second dose a few months ago. I learned from another coworker that almost immediately after she received her shot, she threw up five times.

That other coworker said he threw up only twice, but that was because immediately following his injection he passed out cold.

My friend at school did not want to get the vaccine. She said that in January she got COVID and she got a bad case and was in the hospital for a while. She recovered but her guardian was very worried and forced her to get the vaccine. Following her second shot she missed two days of school due to flu-like side-effects.

A girl at dance, her mother is a nurse if I'm not mistaken. She was pregnant. About a month following her second dose she is around 4-5 months pregnant. The girl misses one day of dance because her mother miscarried.

A brilliant and intelligent girl at school who used to be a close friend got her second dose of Pfizer. I want to say three weeks TO THE DAY later, she misses two days of school. When she comes back, she is not the same. Kind of louder, kind of more careless, kind of more scattered. In our last period she sits in front of me and I see her have something like muscle convulsions twice. She asked the girl next to her to hold her shoulders to control it maybe? She knelt on the floor once too. I texted her later and she said she was diagnosed with a severe neck strain and muscle spasms. She couldn't hold her head up straight and her shoulders weren't lined up in the normal way. The spasms were exercises she was told to do and they are uncontrollable. The girl had to help her stop. The doctor diagnosed it as being due to stress. I know her and I know she is overly stressed about everything. I find the timing a huge coincidence. It could truly be in part to stress, but I do not think that was the catalyst.

Another classmate said getting the vaccine was worse than getting COVID itself.

With any other vaccine all that ever happened to me or anyone I know was a sore arm. Most times I didn't even know they'd gotten one unless they told me. I know that people can get injured, but it is much more rare and I don't know of anyone personally. In comparison, these are 6 people I know or know second-hand that have gotten negatively affected. I do not want to take the very likely chance that I will get hurt taking this vaccine, and I do not want to be forced to do so. My favorite Broadway musical is, ironically, Hamilton. It's funny, a group of ordinary citizens fighting tyranny and fighting for freedoms and choices. And they won. We are here today, living in a country I always thought was truly free. One of my favorite quotes is, 'Raise a glass to freedom. Something they can never take away. No matter what they tell you.' And I believed it. Until the idea of vaccine passports got thrown around. How is THAT protecting freedom? That's not freedom, no matter what angle you try to view it from, light you shine on it, or justification you place on it. As far as I know, I still live in the US and I still have those freedoms and choices. We need you to preserve these fundamental truths by voting yes for HB 248 and making all current as well as future vaccines not mandatory, but a choice.

Sincerely,

Ashton Steele