

June 9, 2021

To the Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and Members of the House Health Committee:

My name is Ashley Bartscherer, MD. I am a pediatric resident at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. I stand in opposition to HB-248, a bill that has the power to endanger the health of children across the state. In 2020, we bore witness to the devastating effects of infectious disease on our loved ones, our health care system, and our health care workers. The whole country is tired and ready to rid themselves of this burden, but we, your physicians, are truly exhausted. We have been pushed, physically and emotionally, to the limit during the COVID pandemic. We put our lives on the line every day in order to provide care to members of our community for over a year. Finally, we are beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel: a vaccine.

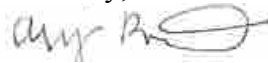
Vaccines, like masks and social distancing, work on both an individual level and a population level. If one individual were to become vaccinated, they would partially protect themselves from the disease. However, the only true method of eradicating disease is by herd immunity, which requires a significant percentage of the population to become vaccinated. We have seen what happens when suddenly herd immunity is removed – for example, look at the measles outbreaks that have been happening due to decreased vaccination rates across the United States. If we do not reach a higher percentage of vaccinations in our community, COVID will return. With its return, we will see it again impact our most vulnerable population (i.e. the young, the immunocompromised), but we will also give it a chance to gain new mutations rendering the vaccine less effective over time, causing a resurgence of the disease. We have a golden window to eradicate this disease, but it requires buy-in from both the community and its supporting government.

Hospitals, daycares, and schools are home to some of our most vulnerable citizens: our children. Vaccine mandates for schools ensure the health and safety of these children. Individuals who are truly against the idea of vaccination still have the right to refuse, but must face the consequences (i.e. finding another job, working from home, homeschooling their child). Safety and health should be the rule, not the exception to the rule.

Hospitals must be able to enforce policies and guidelines that prevent the spread of these diseases to our patients. Mandatory flu shots for employees prevents employee to patient spread. Imagine bringing your toddler to the hospital for an asthma exacerbation and ending up with him intubated in the ICU because his unvaccinated nurse gave him COVID during his stay. That heartbreak, pain, suffering, and hospital expense is preventable.

Despite the overwhelming evidence regarding the vaccine's importance, safety, and effectiveness, we are struggling against misinformation coming from the media and other ill-reputable sources that has made the general public wary of vaccinations. According to the CDC, Hamilton County only has a 44% vaccination rate amongst the general population. This bill would add weight to the misguided doubt and fear that runs rampant in our country. Instead, we need to be a united front – doctors, hospitals, schools, and the government must all be on the same page. By allowing this bill to pass, the government is effectively adding fuel to the fire of misinformation and distrust in the healthcare community. Governments and physicians have a common goal: to protect our fellow human beings. Together, let us do everything in our power to keep these patients and our entire community safe.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ashley Bartscherer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "A".

Ashley Bartscherer, MD  
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