

HB 248: To Prohibit Required Vaccination Status
Opponent Testimony: Joseph Ginty, MD, FAAFP
Ohio House Health Committee
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 248.

COVID-19 vaccinations were developed at a time in our state's and nation's history that finds us deeply polarized on many issues. For many individuals, the ability to defer a vaccination is a matter of personal liberty. As a society, we wrestle with the decision time and time again regarding where to draw the line between personal freedoms and collective needs. As a medical educator and a board-certified family physician, the process of assisting patients, families, and learners with weighing facts and options to make a well-informed decision is a familiar one for me.

Similarly, we should thoughtfully consider the facts and options to make a well-informed decision about whether that line between personal freedoms and society's needs to be redrawn, as HB 248 proposes. It is not a sign of moral weakness to acknowledge new information and perspectives and use that information to alter a previously held opinion; indeed, I would argue that it is the exact opposite, a moral strength, to do so. With that in mind, I request that legislators consider the following:

- The US Food and Drug Administration mandates ongoing reassessment and safety monitoring of all vaccines currently approved for use within the United States. (<https://www.fda.gov/files/vaccines,%20blood%20&%20biologics/published/Ensuring-the-Safety-of-Vaccines-in-the-United-States.pdf>)
- Over 1 million Ohioans have contracted COVID-19, and over 20,000 families in our state are mourning the loss of a loved one to COVID-19. (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/ohio-covid-cases.html>)
- COVID-19's toll is exponentially worse than influenza's (the "flu"), which claims, on average, only about 2,200 Ohioan lives a year. (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/states/ohio/ohio.htm>)
- COVID-19 vaccination has dramatically decreased infections, hospitalizations, and deaths from COVID-19. (<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/covid-cases.html>)

Given these well-established benefits, the places who care for our society's most vulnerable persons, schools and healthcare facilities, must retain their ability to mandate vaccination. Individual business owners should also retain their ability to mandate vaccination to maximize the health of their employees and clients. Removing the ability of schools, hospitals, and businesses to require vaccinations is the opposite of promoting freedom; it is imposing a single, polarized ideology, on all. In the absence of HB 248, individuals who are opposed to vaccination will still be able to choose alternative schooling, employment, or business opportunities.

I emphatically urge legislators to reject HB 248. Its tenets are not based on reputable science. It removes the ability of school, health care, and business leaders to exercise their expert judgment regarding the health needs of those they serve. HB 248 is, frankly, government overreach at its worst. Schools, hospitals, and businesses must retain their autonomy to draw the line between personal belief and society's collective needs. COVID-19 vaccinations, as with all FDA-approved vaccinations, save lives and promote safety for everyone in society, especially our most vulnerable members.