

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in opposition to House Bill 248. My name is Deborah Thompson and I am a speech language pathologist who lives and works in Ohio.

In my work, I have seen hundreds of children including many with moderate to severe disabilities. These students are especially vulnerable to contagious diseases.

House Bill 248 would dramatically expand vaccine exemptions for children entering school or a state licensed childcare center. Additionally, the bill places new restrictions on hospitals and businesses that would place patients, customers, and employees at risk. Finally, in addition to a significant expansion of vaccine exemptions, the bill also prohibits hospitals and other healthcare facilities from taking any steps to control the spread of infectious disease. Perhaps that is why the healthcare and business community here in Ohio is united in its opposition to this legislation.

House Bill 248 would create a disincentive for parents to immunize by broadening the already broad exemptions for childcare and K-12 while also allowing for verbal exemptions. Parents who choose to immunize must schedule an appointment with their primary care provider or visit a pharmacy or health department. They must also submit a form signed by a provider detailing their child's immunization record or attesting to a medical contraindication. Under HB 248, parents who either choose not to immunize or simply don't feel like filling out the form could call the school or daycare and claim a medical or nonmedical exemption with no documentation. As a result, Ohio's immunization rates would suffer.

Further, HB 248 would cripple our ability to have reliable data on immunization rates and status of immunization for children in the event of an outbreak. This information is not public; however, it is used by a school district or health department in determining which children are at risk of a certain disease. This information is especially important to parents of immune-compromised children who cannot receive a vaccine.

No one would argue that immunization is not a personal choice for patients or their parents, however that decision can have public consequences. The fact of the matter is, no one is forced to receive an immunization or discriminated

against for their decision to decline an immunization. Ohio's current vaccine laws for children include both medical and non-medical exemptions. Further, hospitals that require flu vaccination also grant exemptions to employees. Vaccine injuries are incredibly rare, and far more people are harmed, sometimes fatally, by vaccine-preventable diseases.

It is important this committee understands that both medical consensus and public opinion strongly support immunization. Anti-vaccine activists have consistently tried to diminish confidence in vaccination and have made baseless accusations about the conduct of providers who care for Ohioans. It is important that I be able to work with my students free from interference by government and anti-vaccine advocates alike.

In closing, I hope that you understand that risks and complications from vaccine preventable diseases pose a significant risk to the health and freedom of all Ohioans. Ohio's healthcare providers are deeply concerned about this legislation. We are the people you trust with the health of your family and we are asking for you to make the right decision. On behalf of myself, my family, and my students, I hope you will oppose this harmful legislation. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.