

HB 248: To Prohibit Required Vaccination Status
Opponent Testimony: Haig Tcheurekdjian, MD (Immunologist)
Ohio House Health Committee
June 22, 2021

As an immunologist who specializes in the effects of immunization on the individual and the community, I appreciate the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 248. I am gravely concerned by this legislation as it would decimate our ability to fight infectious diseases both now and in the future. Without question, this will lead to the unnecessary deaths of children and adults, and it will also lead to large yet avoidable health care expenses.

Immunizations are one of the most remarkable scientific advances that have transformed the face of modern medicine and society. They allow for a healthy and productive community by preventing illness and death from many infections that do not have a treatment. Immunizations are estimated by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to decrease health care costs exponentially (a nearly 10x decrease in costs). Indirect economic benefits are at least three times greater than this.

Immunization programs do not work on an individual basis. Immunization programs only work if the vast majority of individuals within a community get vaccinated. Each Ohioan that does not receive a vaccine puts all of Ohio at risk. Furthermore, tens of thousands of people in Ohio have weakened immune systems (from cancer, treatment for autoimmune diseases, inherited immune deficiencies, etc.), and their protection from vaccine-preventable illnesses such as measles, polio, or COVID-19 is entirely dependent on their community being vaccinated. Without this protection, these Ohioans are exposed to the risk of death from *preventable* infections *every day*. I personally treat these patients every day of the year, and it is an unacceptable injustice for these infants, children, and adults to die from infections that can be eradicated from the state by immunizing all Ohioans with our currently available safe and effective vaccines.

We have come to take the success of immunizations for granted, but it is because of vaccines that we live our daily lives largely safe from many diseases that once spread through the population unchecked. We cannot afford to risk weakening that protection with HB 248. Vaccinations do not take away our freedoms; vaccinations *give* us freedom.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns as an Ohio citizen, physician, and immunologist. I urge the committee to reject HB 248 to keep Ohioans safe and avoid dangerous consequences for our state and its citizens.

