



Bringing physicians together for a healthier Ohio

To: Members of the Ohio House Health Committee

Fr: Lisa Bohman Egbert, MD
President, Ohio State Medical Association

Da: June 22, 2021

Re: HB 248

As the current president of the Ohio State Medical Association (OSMA), the state's oldest and largest professional organization representing Ohio physicians, medical residents, and medical students, I am writing today on behalf of OSMA in strong opposition to House Bill 248. As a physician, I believe it is important that I make sure to empower people with the best scientific evidence available when they may be hesitant about vaccinations. With that in mind, I would like to address some of the misinformation and falsehoods about the COVID-19 vaccinations currently available to the public that have been a feature of prior deliberations on this bill. I have also heard these and other concerns from patients and others in the community, and I know there is a lot of fear and worry about some of this distorted and deceptive information.

As president of OSMA and as a practicing OBGYN, I recently had the great privilege of participating in a press conference on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines with Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff, Ohio Department of Health chief medical officer, and Dr. Neel Parekh, a men's infertility urologist at the Cleveland Clinic. The goal of this press conference was to clear up specific myths surrounding COVID-19 vaccines and fertility, including safety of these vaccines for patients who are pregnant or who are of childbearing age and may wish to become pregnant in the future. I would like to reiterate that there is no scientific evidence, nor is there a scientific pathway for there to be any ill effects toward fertility, both at the time of vaccination and for future fertility. There is; however, a very real and documented increased risk for morbidity and mortality to both mom and fetus in patients that become infected with COVID-19 during pregnancy. For these reasons, both the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Society for Male Reproduction and Urology recommend COVID-19 vaccinations for all eligible adults. In addition, recent studies have even shown us that vaccinated and breastfeeding mothers can pass COVID-19 antibodies to their infants, which represents a huge advantage in our efforts to help prevent infection in newborns.

Vaccine misinformation is certainly not a new phenomenon, but it is especially unfortunate considering that we live in a time right now when vaccines are safer than ever. Vaccines are developed based on intensive scientific study and data collection by researchers with the highest expertise. All vaccines go through rigorous trials and safety tests before they are released to the public for use, and are monitored for years afterward to ensure quality and safety, and to carefully review any potential, but overall rare adverse events. The COVID-19 vaccines available to us now were subjected to comprehensive testing

and clinical trials with thousands of participants, and millions of people have already been safely vaccinated across the country. Fortunately, severe side effects are extremely rare.

The Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) given for these vaccines by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has been a cause for alarm to some who worry that it suggests these are “experimental” vaccines. I want to reassure you that the EUA does not mean that any of the absolutely necessary steps related to safety research and testing of these vaccines have been neglected. If a determination is made about the need to expedite access, EUA is a tool that allows for bypassing of certain less critical steps in the typical approval process, to facilitate quicker distribution of vaccines in a time of crisis.

The ability of our scientific experts to use mRNA vaccine technology, which had already been researched for over 10 years, to develop such effective new vaccines against COVID-19 in record time (and in a time of extreme need) is an epidemiological triumph. It is understandable that new things may spark worry or distrust at first, but I must emphasize just how fortunate we are to have so few unknowns at this point. We already have so much information to back up these vaccines, and results that are not only extremely promising, but statistically significant as we progress toward stopping the spread of COVID-19 worldwide.

America has spent decades building up immunity against diseases such as polio and measles. Through widespread vaccination, we have been saving lives for many years. Our achievements in public health and advancements in vaccine technology mean that many of these diseases are now much rarer, so the public likely hears much less about the devastation they cause. Perhaps they are now more likely to hear about perceived risks related to vaccines than the suffering caused by the actual diseases from which vaccines protect us. However, as a wealth of evidence and research shows, for the vast majority of people, the benefits of vaccination far outweigh the negligible risk.

It is my duty to work to keep people safe and healthy, and I appreciate the opportunity to clarify some of the concerns about this issue and to dispel persistent myths threatening the health of Ohioans across the state. What concerns me most about HB 248 both as a physician and as a resident of Ohio is the dangerous impact that it would have on the crucial protection we get from all vaccines, which benefits Ohioans every single day. To risk our greatest asset in prevention would not only make future outbreaks and epidemics more likely, but basically inevitable.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments, and I reiterate the urgent need to reject this harmful legislation.

Lisa Bohman Egbert, MD
President, Ohio State Medical Association