

**Committees:**

Armed Services and Veterans Affairs  
House Health Provider Services  
Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee  
State and Local Government  
Technology and Innovation



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**Representative Jennifer Gross  
The Ohio House of Representatives**

Representative Jennifer Gross – HB 319 Sponsor Testimony: Tuesday April 9, 2023

Chairman Cutrona, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Health Provider Services Committee, thank you for allowing Representative Wiggam and I to provide sponsor testimony for HB 319 – the Conscientious Right to Refuse Act.

With the founding of this great nation, two principals at the root of our constitution include protecting the liberties of the “individual” and protecting our freedom of religion. Our Ohio Constitution Article 1, section 7 states - “All men have a natural and indefeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own conscience.” Some in government have lost sight of what that means and have allowed the rights of corporations and businesses to supersede those of the individual and their right of conscience and religion.

Our religious freedom is also protected under Section 4112.02 regarding unlawful discriminatory practices stated as follows:

“It shall be an unlawful discriminatory practice: A) For any employer, because of the race, color, **religion**, sex, military status, national origin, disability, age, or ancestry of any person, to discharge without just cause, to refuse to hire, or otherwise to discriminate against that person with respect to hire, tenure, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, or any matter directly or indirectly related to employment.”

This language applies the same religious discriminatory protections regarding employment agencies, labor organizations, apprentice training programs, places of public accommodations, and housing accommodations.

Although these safeguards are in Ohio law, we continue to have employees and students denied access to education, on campus housing, refused employment, denied the ability to continue to work, or discriminated against and penalized in the workplace because of their conscientious religious objection to vaccination.

Until now, we as a legislative body have failed to protect citizens as their freedoms were being held in contempt during the height of the vaccine mandates. As a result, Ohioans are being forced to put aside their conscientious or religious beliefs or face the reality that they may be unable to operate as productive members of our state, face job loss, or denial of education or job training. Not only is this a direct violation of religious freedom, but it also creates an undue financial hardship on taxpayers when good workers are driven out of their jobs or fields and onto an overburdened unemployment system.

As a board-certified family nurse practitioner and legislator, I am a proponent of scientific research and informed choice. I advocate for and support Ohio citizens and patients. Healthcare decisions should be made free from coercion and an individual should be allowed the right to refuse vaccinations or pharmaceuticals based on their conscientious or religious beliefs.

As representatives, it is our duty to protect the religious freedoms of our constituents. These liberties are infringed upon each time an individual cannot work, learn, or participate in commerce because of their private medical choices. In the case of vaccine mandates, we have allowed public health requirements to supersede the religious rights of individuals. The Conscientious Right to Refuse Act corrects this wrong and ensures Ohio Citizens have the freedom to refuse vaccines or pharmaceuticals without discriminatory action.

It is imperative that we stand to protect the religious and moral beliefs of all Ohioans. HB 319 ensures that our citizens have a safeguard against violations of freedom in the form of vaccine mandates, both now and in future. Chairman Cutrona and members of the Health Provider Services Committee, thank you once again for this opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on HB 319. I welcome my joint sponsor, Representative Wiggam, for further testimony.