



Ryan Mezinger, RPh
The MetroHealth System
SB 144 -Proponent Testimony
Health Provider Services Committee
April 16, 2024

Chairman Cutrona, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani and members of the House Health Provider Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 144 (“SB 144”). The bill would restore the ability of eligible certified or registered pharmacy technicians to administer vaccinations and expand the capacity and availability of pharmacy services providers.

My name is Ryan Mezinger and I serve as MetroHealth’s Chief Pharmacy Officer. MetroHealth is a super safety-net provider located in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, which includes the City of Cleveland and its surrounding suburbs. Founded in 1837, MetroHealth has served Cuyahoga County longer than any other Cleveland healthcare organization.

One of the essential services MetroHealth provides the Cleveland area is pharmacy services. We currently employ over 400 pharmacists and technicians and provide pharmacy services at eleven community locations. Most of these locations are in highly socially vulnerable areas, and our pharmacists there help prevent disease and treat chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and asthma. Our pharmacy teams also provide vaccinations across all locations, as well as at off-site locations for expanded availability. Without access to pharmacy services, many patients within these communities would turn to a hospital emergency department for their primary source of health care and would not have the option to receive preventive care, such as vaccines.

Improving Access & Availability to Pharmacy Services

SB 144 would ensure we can continue providing primary care across all MetroHealth locations. Our pharmacy teams were able to provide vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Ohio Board of Pharmacy issued rules to allow the continuation of such services post COVID-19, but current State law does not support these rules. These services were provided without safety issues or adverse patient outcomes. The communities we serve rely on continuity of access and availability that our current pharmacy team helps provide.

Additionally, SB 144 would help us expand access and availability to preventive services, such as vaccines. Currently, we are faced with a severe workforce shortage across our system and our physicians and nursing staff are struggling to keep access open and available. By allowing pharmacists and pharmacy technicians to practice at the top of their license, we can provide expanded and more easily available preventive care, such as vaccines, to our communities. For example, by expanding the age band for COVID-19 vaccines, pharmacists can administer these vaccines at one of our community pharmacy locations rather than asking the family to schedule a separate visit at one our clinics. The technicians would also be available to help administer the vaccines, which increases the bandwidth of the pharmacists.

Simply put, SB 144 will save lives and help our community live a more healthy and prosperous life. By expanding access and availability of primary health care services at places like MetroHealth, the bill will also help reduce health disparities within Cuyahoga County and across Ohio. I urge full support and swift passage of SB 144.