

Chairman Cutrona, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Health Provider Services Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide support testimony for HB 319, "The Conscientious Right to Refuse Act."

Retaining the right to decline any vaccine or drug that violates one's conscience or religion without facing discriminatory action is a critical aspect of personal freedom and individual rights. This principle is essential for several reasons. Firstly, individuals should have control over their own bodies and the medical treatments they receive, as this is a fundamental aspect of personal autonomy and bodily integrity. Secondly, the ability to make decisions based on personal conscience and religious beliefs is a cornerstone of many democratic societies, ensuring that individuals are not forced to act against deeply held beliefs. Thirdly, allowing people to make informed choices about their healthcare without coercion fosters trust in the healthcare system, which is essential for effective public health strategies, especially during a pandemic. Additionally, many legal frameworks and ethical guidelines support the right to informed consent and the refusal of treatment. Upholding these standards is vital for maintaining ethical integrity in healthcare practices. Furthermore, allowing individuals to exercise their rights without facing discrimination helps maintain social harmony and inclusivity by ensuring that diverse beliefs and values are respected within the community. Finally, protecting these rights now sets a crucial precedent for future emergencies, ensuring that responses to future pandemics or health crises will also respect individual rights and freedoms. In conclusion, retaining the right to decline vaccines or drugs that violate one's conscience or religion is essential for maintaining personal freedom, trust in the healthcare system, and social harmony, and it is important to ensure that these rights are protected both now and in any future pandemic.

In 2021, I experienced significant discrimination and a grave violation of my rights when I was terminated from my place of employment after following their policies for an exemption based on religious reasoning. Despite adhering to the outlined procedures and submitting the necessary documentation, I was not afforded even the basic courtesy of an interview to discuss possible accommodations. Instead, I faced blatant discrimination as my sincere religious beliefs were disregarded entirely. Ultimately, I was unjustly terminated, resulting in the loss of my livelihood. This experience was not only deeply distressing but also a stark example of the severe consequences of denying individuals the right to make personal medical decisions in line with their conscience and religious convictions.

Additionally, my personal history underscores the importance of these protections. As a child, I experienced a severe reaction to a vaccine, which has deeply influenced my perspective on medical autonomy and the necessity of making informed, personal health decisions. This

experience has made it clear to me that individuals must have the right to refuse medical treatments that they believe could harm them, based on their health history, conscience, or religious beliefs.

In closing, it is imperative that Ohioans have their right of conscience and religion protected from the medical overreach of employers or those providing public services. Both the U.S. and Ohio State constitutions explicitly address the right to conscience and religious freedom, yet recent events have highlighted the urgent need to reinforce these protections at the state level. It is time to ensure that these fundamental freedoms are safeguarded for all Ohioans. I urge the committee members to please vote yes on HB 319.