

## Brigid Novak

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Chairman Al Cutrona  
Vice-Chair Jennifer Gross  
Ranking Member Anita Somani  
Members of Health Provider Services Committee  
Ohio Statehouse, Columbus, OH

Dear Members of the Ohio House Health Provider Services Committee:

I am writing to express my support for the passage of HB 319 “Conscientious Right to Refuse Act.” The First Amendment of the United States Constitution has affirmed the individual’s right of the free exercise of religion; the Ohio Constitution reinforces this truth for all Ohioans. HB 319, when codified into law, will serve to strengthen each individual’s basic right to live as their conscience determines--without facing discriminatory action.

As the world began to shutdown down in 2020, and restrictive practices continued into 2021 over virus concerns, I retained the services of an attorney, Warner Mendenhall of Mendenhall Law Group, to assist me in seeking a religious exemption from my employer in the event of a “forced ‘vaccination’ mandate.” As predicted, my employer mandated that all employees provide proof of vaccination for the “Covid-19 virus” in November of 2021. I had made the personal decision to not receive a Covid-19 shot(s), and I completed the necessary paperwork as required by my employer, provided a detailed letter outlining my sincerely held religious belief, and my attorney provided a letter verifying that my belief met the legal criteria for a religious exemption.

Despite following each step as required by my employer, the human resources manager responded to me with a discriminatory letter—asking for more information and essentially denying the exemption request. As I am a Catholic, the human resources manager argued that the Vatican had announced publicly that Popes Francis and Benedict were “vaccinated,” and that the Catholic Church was in favor of vaccines.

Mr. Mendenhall intervened, and my employer did eventually acquiesce and grant the religious exemption. What followed was/is subvert discriminatory treatment, particularly pertaining to the wearing of face-coverings and separation from other employees. For example, in June 2022, I was forced to use several personal sick time days, although I had no

symptoms of any illness--to “quarantine” because a staff person whom I supervise tested positive for the Covid-19 virus. As an “unvaccinated” person, I was apparently “risking” the lives of others by being in same room with them. Obviously, my “vaccination” status, which should be private health information for any person, (and despite the human resources department declarations of confidentiality) becomes public and a topic of gossip, rumor, and inuendo amongst staff. Sadly, my experience is far from unique—thousands of Ohioans are suffering under unfair and discriminatory employment practices simply because they are following their religious conscience.

Ohioans, regardless of religious affiliation or belief, should not have to live as though a guillotine was hanging over them every moment of their lives. No person should have to fear being threatened, bullied, or coerced by an employer, public service representative, or medical personnel simply to because they wish to exercise their right of conscience and religion. This freedom is already confirmed in the United States Constitution and the Ohio Constitution—it is time to ensure these basic rights are protected at the state level. I urge the committee to vote YES on HB 319.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brigid Novak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "B".

Brigid Novak