

# Ohio Chapter

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## Testimony of Melissa Arnold *Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics* Ohio House Health Provider Services Committee *House Bill 319 – Opponent Testimony*

Chairman Swearingen, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Ohio House Health Provider Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer opponent testimony on House Bill 319. I am testifying on behalf of the nearly 3,000 members of the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

First, let me state unequivocally that immunizations are safe and effective. They are one of the most important medical developments in human history and are the reason why many diseases have been eradicated. HB 319 seeks to undermine confidence in vaccine efficacy and will only place Ohioans, especially those patients in a hospital, at risk.

Healthcare providers are responsible for keeping their patients safe and healthy, especially if the patient has a compromise immune system or other medical condition. Unfortunately, highly contagious viruses such as influenza and COVID-19 remain a concern and a threat to these patients. Many healthcare facilities require employees to be immunized against the seasonal flu and, in some cases, COVID-19. This is a simple, but important safeguard to protect patients and keep staff healthy during flu season.

HB 319 would effectively eliminate the impact of employee vaccine requirements by prohibiting hospitals and healthcare facilities from enforcing these programs. Many employers grant exemptions or make accommodations to clinical staff who either decline a flu vaccine or have a rare medical condition that prevents them from receiving a vaccine. Further, HB 319 prohibits facilities from taking any precautions for unvaccinated staff, such as masking or temporary reassignment to a non-patient facing position.

Let me provide you with an example of why this is a bad idea. Newborn babies being treated in a NICU are extremely fragile and exposure to the influenza virus could provide fatal. Under HB 319, those clinicians and staff working in the NICU who decline to be immunized against influenza would be allowed to continue treating patients without a mask or any other safeguard. This would place those newborns at risk and that is wholly unnecessary and irresponsible.

Vaccine requirements are meant to protect patients and the general public by utilizing a proven strategy that is safe and effective. In rare instances when an employee declines a vaccine, we can make accommodations to ensure patients remain protected and healthy. HB 319 erodes our ability to keep patients safe and therefore we urge the committee to reject this measure. Thank you for your consideration.

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### Ohio Chapter

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