



December 4, 2024

Chairman Adam Matthews  
Ohio House of Representatives  
Public Health Policy Committee

Chair Matthews, Vice Chair Stewart, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Andriana La Mantia and I am a second year pediatric resident at Nationwide Children's Hospital.

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of SB 234, which designates May as Food Allergy Awareness Month. This bill has the potential to educate parents, caretakers, and the public on the signs, symptoms, and treatment of food allergies which could ultimately save lives.

Over the past decade, the prevalence of food allergies in developed countries has risen significantly, with one in every thirteen children being diagnosed.<sup>1</sup> Symptoms of food allergies occur within minutes of food ingestion and range from mild itching of the mouth or hives on the face, to life threatening anaphylaxis presenting as severe respiratory distress, profuse vomiting, and dangerously low blood pressure. With each ingestion of the food allergen, children can display differing severities of symptoms, making ingestion unpredictable and dangerous.

Not only am I passionate about advocating for awareness, but food allergies are very personal to my family. Years ago, when my sister was three, she was eating breakfast and within minutes of taking her first bites of egg, hives erupted all over her body, she started coughing, and was not able to talk in full sentences. We lived down the street from a fire station, so my mother immediately brought her there, where they used an epi pen. Thankfully she had rapid resolution of her symptoms and was back to her normal self in no time.

However, there were unexpected consequences that emerged after this event, namely the pervasive and heightened anxiety that comes with severe food allergies. From then on, my family was always vigilant, reading the ingredient lists thoroughly, and inspecting menus and food at restaurants extensively before allowing her to eat anything. Not only did it negatively impact our mental health, but also my sister's overall quality of life. She was fearful of trying new foods, going to birthday parties, and traveling, because of the uncertainty of what ingredients were in her food. Our experience is not unique. At Nationwide Children's in 2023, there was an 11-fold increase in psychology referrals for food related anxiety compared to yearly in 2018-2022.

Increased awareness of food allergies, their symptoms, and treatments which will all come from May as Food Allergy awareness month, can shift this responsibility and accountability from individual families to

the entire Ohio community. This knowledge in the general public can drastically improve not only children's safety but their quality of life. Let's work together to make children learn to love food again.

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of SB 234.

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