

THE OHIO COUNCIL OF

Retail Merchants
The voice of retail since 1922

**Proponent Testimony on Senate Bill 144
Before the Senate Health Committee**

Lora Miller
Director of Governmental Affairs and Public Relations
Ohio Council of Retail Merchants

October 11, 2023

Good morning, Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health Committee. On behalf of more than 1,600 pharmacies that are members of the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants (OCRM), we are grateful for the opportunity to appear in support of Senate Bill 144. Our special thanks to Senator Romanchuk for his sponsorship of this important bill.

During the COVID-19 public health emergency (PHE), pharmacists and pharmacy staff were called upon by the federal government to administer all CDC-recommended vaccines to individuals ages three and older. The PREP (Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness) Act was amended to provide properly trained pharmacists and pharmacy technicians with this authority. During the two-and-a-half years the PHE was in place, these health care professionals administered over 14 million vaccines to Ohioans. Forty percent of those vaccinations were given in hard to reach rural and urban areas, areas where the pharmacy is often the only access to health care that residents may have. These statistics demonstrate how pharmacies have safely and responsibly expanded vaccine access in neighborhoods across the state. They also accentuate the need for more vaccine providers.

Unfortunately, when the PHE ended on May 11, 2023, the amendments to the PREP Act expired. The law governing the administration of immunizations in Ohio was once again effective, which permits only properly trained *pharmacists* to administer all CDC-recommended vaccines to ages 13 and older and to those ages seven to 12 with a prescription from a licensed prescriber. These unnecessary restrictions are both an inconvenience and a barrier to families. In order to reinstate the same kind of broad access to immunizations that existed during the PHE, the legislature needs to enact Senate Bill 144. It would codify the provisions of the PREP Act amendments into Ohio law.

I would like to highlight that the bill includes a provision that states if a child does not have a pediatrician or other primary care provider, pharmacy staff are required to inform the child's parent or legal guardian of the importance of well child visits and refer patients when appropriate. This requirement will help get children without pediatricians into the primary care system and encourage the parents of children who do have a medical home to schedule a well-child visit. Pharmacists and their staff are health care partners, not health care competitors. They want to work with all prescribers to effect positive outcomes for their patients and help fill the gap in access.

Pharmacists, interns and technicians have long been trusted health care providers in their communities and the critical role they played throughout the COVID-19 pandemic fundamentally changed the way many Americans view their local pharmacy. By supporting Senate Bill 144, you are ensuring the continuation of that access for Ohio patients. We need to move forward, not in reverse.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the support of the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.