



Ohio Senate
Senate Building
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215
(614) 466-8060
Gavarone@ohiosenate.gov

Committees:
Local Government - *Vice Chair*
JCARR - *Vice Chair*
Finance
General Government
Rules and Reference
Judiciary

Theresa Gavarone
Majority Whip
2nd District

Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to give sponsor testimony on SB 234, which creates a Food Allergy Awareness Month in Ohio.

This bill is very simple, but its impact could be life saving. I have a personal story. When I was a mother with 3 young kids, I had no experience or knowledge about food allergies. But one of my children would develop strange rashes at an early age – she was probably 1 or 2 years old. When I took her to the doctor, I was told that she was too young for an allergy test, but told to give her Benadryl and put her in an oatmeal bath to see if the rash goes away, and it did. We didn't know if she was exposed to something in the grass or what the cause could be, but she kept getting these rashes, and we were given the same advice, and it worked. When she was 3 years old, she was eating butter pecan ice cream. She started vomiting, and I thought she might be choking and then she stopped and seemed okay. I had no idea that vomiting was a sign of a food allergy. About a month later, it was Halloween, and this child has a sweet tooth – she was so excited for the candy! As we were trick or treating, she was eating candy along the way. About 4 houses in, she said she didn't feel well and wanted to go home. I told her "that's what happens when you eat too much candy". A few months went by, and I was grocery shopping with my 3 kids, ages 6, 4 and 2. My daughter, now 4, grabs a brownie sample with walnuts off the table, takes a bite and starts vomiting. My 2 year old suddenly had to go to the bathroom – my daughter was in the cart, I grabbed a coffee cup for her to vomit in, and we raced across the store to the bathroom. My daughter seemed to be gasping for air. We made it to the bathroom on time. By the time we got there, she had hives up and down her arms. Now she was old enough for an allergy test, and we discovered she is severely allergic to tree nuts, and she had the most severe reactions on the scale. From that point on we carried an EpiPen everywhere.

I learned as much as I could about this allergy. We have no idea where it came from and no experience. I learned that the more exposures, the more severe the reactions can get. When she started school, I gave EpiPen testers with a video to make sure everyone knew how to use it. I would talk to each of her teachers, and I made sure they

always had nut-free treats for her in case someone brought treats for the class. She had a few exposures, but the reactions were limited to rashes.

Although she carried that EpiPen for 17 years at that point without using it, when she was 21 years old, while at a destination wedding in Cartagena, Columbia, South America, she bought a pastry while heading to the airport and asked if there were nuts. She was told no, but went into immediate anaphylaxis after taking a bite – it was made with Nutella. She had a choice to go to a Cartagena hospital or get on an international flight. She took Benadryl, Zyrtec, and after she could no longer speak from the exposure, for the first time used her EpiPen. She got on the flight. A few months later, she was ordering donuts. She checked the label, which listed allergens but did not mention nuts. She bit into the donut, and it was also made with Nutella. She took her EpiPen and was taken to the ER. Then last fall, while eating at a restaurant, she told the waiter she has a severe tree nut allergy, and the waiter wrote it down on the pad. At the end of the meal, he brought cookies to the table. She ate one and immediately went into anaphylaxis – they were almond cookies. This time, the EpiPen didn't work, and she was rushed to the hospital and placed on IVs for hours. We have no idea what will happen if there's another exposure.

Then I heard this story on the news about a doctor who ate at a restaurant in Florida. The food contained an undisclosed allergen. Her EpiPen didn't work. She died from Anaphylaxis. We need to do what we can to educate the public, to educate restaurants, schools and teachers and also families. The purpose of this bill is to draw attention to a severe and life threatening condition that far too many people face. We can do better to make sure people are safe, that people know what to look for, and to make sure people are aware of the severe risks associated with these allergies.

Chairman Huffman, thank you again for allowing me to give sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 234 today. I am happy to answer any questions members of the committee may have at this time.