

Written Testimony in Opposition of House Bill 561 to the Ohio House Health Committee by  
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3/20/2026

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony today. My name is Cara Jacob and I am a board certified physician practicing in Ohio. I have cared for patients in this state for over 13 years, and I am writing to express my opposition to House Bill 561.

Childhood immunization requirements in Ohio's daycares and K-12 schools are a cornerstone of public health. They protect children, families, and communities from serious, preventable disease outbreaks. House Bill 561 would weaken these protections by loosening exemption standards, removing certain immunization requirements, and allowing unvaccinated students to attend school during active outbreaks, changes that carry significant public health risks.

School and daycare immunization requirements also serve an important secondary function: they create a critical point of contact with the healthcare system. For many children, these requirements prompt visits to a pediatrician that might not otherwise occur. Those visits are not just about vaccines, they are opportunities to identify developmental delays, signs of malnutrition, abuse or a heart murmur. They are also a chance for healthcare providers to have informed, evidence-based conversations with parents. By making exemptions easier and eliminating the need for meaningful engagement, this bill risks removing what may be a child's only interaction with a healthcare professional.

Additionally, removing a school's ability to require a standardized exemption form will lead to inconsistent and incomplete records, making it harder for schools and public health officials to respond quickly and effectively during outbreaks.

Allowing unvaccinated children to remain in school during an outbreak is particularly concerning. Consider measles, one of the most contagious viruses known to humans. Approximately 90% of unvaccinated individuals exposed to measles will become infected. Individuals are contagious for several days before symptoms appear, meaning the virus can spread widely before anyone realizes there is a problem. In a classroom setting, this creates the potential for rapid and extensive transmission, putting entire school communities at risk.

Finally, this bill addresses a problem that does not exist. Ohio already allows vaccine exemptions for medical, religious, and conscientious reasons. House Bill 561 goes further,

not by protecting choice, but by promoting exemptions in a way that undermines the health and safety of all children, especially those who are most vulnerable.

At the end of the day, Ohio's required childhood immunizations are safe, effective, and essential. We should be strengthening trust in these protections not weakening them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Cara Jacob, MD