

Written Testimony in Opposition of HB 561- Parental C.H.O.I.C.E Act - by Katheryne Ruck,
DO, Family Physician
25 March 2026

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Dr. Katheryne Ruck and I am a board certified Family Physician practicing in Cincinnati, OH. I care for all ages and all demographics. I am here today to express my strong opposition to House Bill 561. My duty as a physician is to protect my patients - and first and foremost to do no harm.

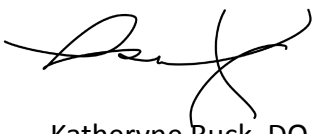
HB 561 will do harm. Vaccination exemptions without a medical reason will have unintended consequences and harm will come to our most vulnerable citizens - our children. Vaccines, especially early childhood immunizations, protect our children from communicable disease. Contrary to popular belief, Hepatitis B is not just a sexually transmitted disease. Hepatitis B is a blood borne viral disease that can be transmitted from objects in the community that could have microscopic drops of blood or bodily fluids. Playgrounds, schools, door handles, doctor office floors, library books could all become dangerous vectors to children who are unimmunized.

The consequence of not immunizing our children against hepatitis B is catastrophic. 50% of people do not even know they have hepatitis B. Hepatitis B rates are highest in Appalachia and the abutting states - like Ohio. Hepatitis B can lead to liver failure necessitating liver transplant and lifelong antirejection medications. However, there are not enough liver donors to help everyone on the transplant list and so therefore, deaths from liver failure due to hepatitis B will rise. Hepatitis B also predisposes individuals to developing liver cancer.

The second part of HB 561 regarding school admission during an outbreak is dangerous. Unimmunized children attending school during an ongoing outbreak such as measles will be like lighting a match in a dry forest. For herd immunity, you must have 95% of children immunized to protect the unimmunized. In Ohio, in 2024-2025, the immunization rate for measles was 88%. Expressly allowing unimmunized children to attend during an outbreak will sharply increase the spread. Measles infects quickly and for hours after a person leaves a room.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this harmful bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katheryne Ruck', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Katheryne Ruck, DO