

Chairwoman Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Health Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Dana Howard. I am a bioethicist and a member of Defend Public Health Ohio. But today I come before primarily you as a concerned mom of an elementary school student in Columbus City Schools. I am strongly opposed to HB561.

I have to say that this is the first time that I am testifying in person at the State House and I decided to come today because I am tired of sitting by and reading in the Dispatch about a new bill that jeopardizes the health of our children and our communities and chips away at reasonable public health measures that would protect our kids if there is an outbreak. There are a number of worrying parts of this bill: that it would remove the hepatitis B vaccine from childcare requirements, that it would limit the ability of schools and childcare centers to manage outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases, and that it undermines accurate vaccination reporting.

The thing I want to focus on is the way this bill limits the abilities of schools and childcare centers to keep children safe were there to be a known outbreak. The bill as written states that if there is a chicken pox or measles outbreak, a school may deny admission to a student who has contracted the disease, BUT and now I am quoting “A school shall not deny admission to an uninfected pupil, including a pupil who is otherwise exempted from the immunization requirements.”

I think this is a dangerous measure that comes exactly at the wrong time. As a mom, I take myself to be responsible not only for the health and wellbeing of my own child, but also do my part to make sure that others around her are safe, especially those who are most vulnerable – like kids that are immune compromised or babies that aren’t yet fully vaccinated. I think we should all take our responsibility to keeping our community safe and I hope that parents who choose to not vaccinate their kids take this responsibility seriously as well. But these parents may not even know yet that their child is infected. And sending their kid to school can endanger other children who have not been or cannot be vaccinated.

According to the CDC, if you have measles, up to 90% of the people close to you, who are not immune, will also become infected. An infected person can spread measles to others even before knowing they have the disease. You can spread measles to others from 4 days before through 4 days after the rash appears.¹ The Ohio Department of Health warned there have been several measles outbreaks in Ohio in 2025, including six cases in Columbus last

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/measles/causes/index.html>

month. This bill would limit the ability of schools and daycare centers to minimize exposure, exactly at a time when we need to have measures available to keep all Ohio children protected – especially kids who are not vaccinated.

I will close by saying that this bill is to be called the parental “CHOICE” act. But it puts the choices of some parents over the choices of others. We love going to the Arnold Invitational each year and talked it up to our friends who just moved to Columbus who have an eight month old that is not yet vaccinated against measles. With the recent measles outbreaks, they did not feel comfortable going and taking their child. Their choices are constrained when we have more outbreaks; as are the choices of parents who have children with medical conditions and cannot vaccinate their kids.

Ohio already has laws in place that give parents the right to refuse to vaccinate their child for medical or conscientious reasons. As the sponsors of the bill make clear, this bill does not actually broaden these exemptions. All this language does is put more restrictions on what schools and daycare centers can do in the face of an outbreak in order to keep all our children and the general public safe.

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

Thank you,

Dana Howard

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