

HB 561

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Mary Alleger and I am writing to **strongly oppose** House Bill 561.

I am a fierce proponent of vaccines because they are a miracle of modern science. My 80-year-old father still remembers the terror of the pre-vaccine era—the children he knew who lived in iron lungs or died from polio. Vaccines saved those lives then, and they save lives every single day now. Due to the widespread misinformation of the anti-vaccine movement, we are now forced to battle diseases we had once eradicated.

I think it is important to acknowledge the reality in this room. Most, if not all, of the members of this committee are healthy enough to be here today because you were likely vaccinated as children. You are currently the beneficiaries of the very public health mandates that HB 561 seeks to dismantle. It is a dangerous irony to use the health and safety afforded to you by vaccines to pass legislation that puts the next generation of Ohio's children at risk.

This legislation ignores the deadly reality of a world without vaccines. HB 561 moves us backward by making it easier for children to remain unvaccinated in our schools and child care centers. The data shows we are already in a state of crisis. Please consider these confirmed U.S. Measles statistics from the CDC website:

- **2024:** 285 total cases nationwide.
- **2025:** 2,285 cases—a nearly **800% increase** in just one year.
- **2026 (as of March 19):** 1,487 cases already reported. **At this rate, 2026 will be the deadliest year for measles in decades.**
- **The Spread:** In 2024, 69% of cases were outbreak-associated. Today, in 2026, a staggering **94%** of cases are tied to outbreaks.

These aren't just numbers; they represent preventable suffering. Just this past November, three infants in Kentucky died from whooping cough—the first there since 2018. None of those babies were vaccinated. In October 2025, a premature baby died from measles after the mother caught it during an outbreak. Had the mother been vaccinated, that child would probably be alive today.

If passed, HB 561 would restrict our schools and childcare centers from properly managing public health, creating a dangerous environment for our most vulnerable children.

The most critical reason we must maintain strong vaccination policies is **Herd Immunity**. We must protect the members of our community who legitimately cannot be vaccinated for health reasons, such as immunocompromised individuals or infants who are too young to receive their shots. They rely entirely on the rest of us to block the spread of infectious diseases. By

mandating that schools highlight exemptions and prohibiting them from requesting basic health information, we are effectively dismantling the herd immunity that protects our most vulnerable.

Additionally, as a daughter of a U.S. Army Veteran, may I remind you that our nation's military has understood this necessity for nearly 250 years. As far back as 1777, George Washington mandated smallpox inoculations because he knew an unvaccinated army was a defeated army. Today, our service members are required to be immunized against a battery of diseases—from polio to meningitis—because the Pentagon knows that any minor risk is vastly outweighed by the benefit of staying alive and ready. Even amidst modern controversy, the military achieved a 97% vaccination rate for active-duty forces during the COVID-19 pandemic. They understand that while individual concerns exist, the safety of the whole depends on the immunity of the group. So why don't our Ohio legislators?

HB 561 would actively undermine our ability to contain outbreaks and protect our children. I urge you to look at the history, look at the science, and vote NO on HB 561.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

United States Measles Outbreaks:

<https://www.cdc.gov/measles/data-research/>

Kentucky Whooping Cough Infant Deaths:

<https://www.chfs.ky.gov/News/Documents/Third%20Infant%20Pertussis%20Death%20Reported%20in%20Kentucky%20in%202012%20Months.pdf>

Canadian Measles Infant Death:

<https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/measles/another-canadian-baby-dies-measles-south-carolina-reports-outbreak>

U.S. military vaccination policy:

<https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/health-and-medicine/us-military-vaccination-policy>