



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
FOR HEALTHY LIVING  
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 561. My name is Bobbi Shannon and I am the Executive Director of Early Learning for the YMCA of Central Ohio. I am here on behalf of the Ohio Alliance of YMCAs.

The Ohio Alliance of YMCAs is a nonprofit organization that represents Ohio's YMCAs. Ohio YMCAs are in 164 communities around the state, and serve 1.9 million Ohioans, both children and adults. Ohio YMCAs are the largest childcare provider in Ohio, providing care for over 250,000 children each year.

At the YMCA of Central Ohio, we serve over 6,400 youth annually in over 100 programs including early learning, Head Start, school age, teens and summer day camp. We serve children as young as six weeks old in our Early Learning Centers.

Ohio YMCAs have been providing child care for Ohio families for over 50 years, and serving Ohioans with a vast array of programs and supports for 171 years. Today, Ohio's Ys remain committed to serving all families in need of support and care, including early learning and school age programs. As such, we have grave concerns about HB 561's implications for parent choice and the right of private businesses.

### **Current Law Does Not Prohibit Centers from Serving All Families**

Under current law, the state requires children enrolled at a child care center to be vaccinated against a number of diseases, with three exemptions from that requirement. However, as private businesses, child care centers, including YMCAs, are not prohibited from adopting a policy that requires all children in its center to be immunized. Child care centers differ from schools in this very important way, as a school is a public entity that is required to provide education to every child in the school's district. Private child care centers do not have those same requirements.

YMCAs care for a broad array of families and their children. Many of the children in our care are infants, and toddlers and preschoolers that have weakened immune systems. In the case of these types of children, vaccines are not available to them. If these children were in the same center as an unvaccinated child who contracted a disease such as measles, and unknowingly exposed others, the results could be deadly.



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YMCA child care centers, including the YMCA of Central Ohio, currently have policies in place requiring all children in care to be immunized because we care for such children. However, all child care centers do not. Thus, families who choose to decline vaccines can find care at centers that permit it, and families who have infants and medically fragile children for whom they are worried also can find care.

### **HB 561 Would Restrict Families' Choice and Access to Care**

Under the bill, child care centers would be required to notify all families of the state's vaccine requirements and exemptions. If a center failed to comply with this requirement, the center's license would be suspended.

The bill does not include language permitting a center to alter that notification if the center has a policy in place that requires immunizations. Thus, functionally, the bill removes the ability for a center to have such a policy in place.

Eliminating the ability of centers to choose to require immunizations would leave families concerned about their infants and children with weakened immune systems with no place to find child care. YMCAs believe that parental choice should be prioritized. HB 561 removes that choice from parents of infants and children with weakened immune systems.

HB 561 also interferes in the right of private businesses to decide what is best for them. YMCAs, like other private child care centers, should be able to decide what policies are best suited to the families they serve.

### **Conclusion**

We respectfully request that the Committee consider removing child care centers from HB 561.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.