

Chairwoman Manchester, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Weinstein, and members of the Ohio Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Phillip Pitzer, and I am a biotechnology student at the Delaware Area Career Center. I am here today to speak in support of Senate Bill 111.

Henrietta Lacks's role in advancing biochemistry and cell biology may not have been direct, but it was still extremely important and impactful nonetheless. HeLa, her own cell line, which was named after her, was the first immortalized human cell line. This sounds important and monumental, but what does that really mean? The cells collected from Mrs. Lacks were unusual: they divided abnormally fast; in fact, they divided multiple times before the cells died, hence the immortal moniker. A cell line that would continue to divide indefinitely was revolutionary. Using primary cells, scientists were unable to compare research on the same disease between different experiments and labs, as they all used different donated cells. An immortalized cell line eliminated this issue. Now, scientists around the world use the HeLa cell line, making it the most used cell line in the world.

Henrietta Lacks's cells made some of the most influential breakthroughs in biomedical science possible. In 1954, the polio vaccine was created using HeLa cells. In 1964, HeLa cells went to space. In the following decades, HeLa cells were used to advance research in HIV, tuberculosis, Ebola, and numerous cancers, including cervical cancer. HeLa cells were also instrumental in the research of some COVID-19 vaccines; this shows how impactful the HeLa cell line is. The cells are still being used 75 years later in the same fundamental state they were when they were first collected. The cells served an important part in numerous awarded research projects, including three projects in particular that all won Nobel Prizes.

Marking October 4th as "Henrietta Lacks Day" won't fix the injustice that has happened to her. It will bring recognition and discussion on the importance of informed consent, and that is what we must take from this day. This day should not be spent lamenting over what has already happened. It should be spent celebrating Henrietta Lacks and her immortal effect on the world, it should be spent educating ourselves on consent, and it should be spent looking forward to make sure a similar injustice does not occur again.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak today, and I am excited to see the future of this bill.