

Written proponent testimony for HB 248 to stop discrimination that is based on medical status :

Health Committee Chairman Lipps, Representative Gross and other members of the Health Committee: my name is Michelle Plecnik. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony.

I am a proponent of HB 248. I feel that we must protect an individual's right to private discussion and decision with their chosen physicians about their unique personal medical situations and decisions regarding their one body. No one should be allowed to use coercion to force something into or onto another's body – whether in the form of a threat of termination of employment, a ban on grocery store entry, overlooked for college or other school entry, being forced to mask or being otherwise pointed out and isolated from others, or any other financial, employment-related, governmental / police or social pressure. This coercive pressure is especially bad when it is done by someone in power – an employer, a school administration, a business owner of essential items such as food, medical help or tax assistance, a governor – to an average citizen who feels powerless to say no. Beyond basic citizens' rights, unique medical situations and personal life situations, there are metaphysical, spiritual and religious reasons that one may not be comfortable with a particular medical intervention. As a nurse I recall we frequently advocated for and willingly changed medical plans in order to fit in with the beliefs and needs of Jehovahs Witness believers, as an example. I feel that the day when one must explain extremely personal and deeply held convictions to an employer or to a grocery store door guard in order to obtain the necessities of life is a day we no longer live freely as human beings with dignity.

As a nurse, I have spent the last decade advocating for my patient's unique needs and decisions. I spent time trying to get to know my patient, their family and their needs. These patient's decisions occasionally went against the preferred advice that their hospital physician recommended. Many times, it would be a difficult decision, made under difficult situations and would be due to very unique personal circumstances or due to a deeply held religious belief. That patient needed me, as their nurse, and their benevolent physicians to act as their advocates against a system of algorithms that does not recognize human individuality. We were honored to try to understand their situation and adapt to their needs, enabling them to feel confident while receiving care that they requested.

However, as a nurse within a large hospital system myself, I myself did not have an advocate. Each year on my birthday month I would be told I must go to occupational health to get TB testing. There was no physician advocate at that place to help me understand why I was doing this or what side effects may be. There would only be a nurse, who was tasked with following orders and processing employees. Looking back, it is strange that this was such a mechanical, robotic way of doing things – nothing like how I was watching over and advocating for my own patients uniqueness.

Through the years, the influenza vaccine became mandated. At first, it was offered as a benefit to employment with the hospital system – and I appreciated the ability to receive the vaccine if I wished year to year.

More recently though, this flu vaccine became mandated. More and more pressure was placed on us each year to take it – most recently requiring official documentation of proof as to the medical or religious reason why we would not take it, if we chose not to.

Unfortunately, it was during these mandated years that I had the most concerns personally with this medical intervention – both on a religious front and a physical front. I began to try to understand how the vaccine was made while at the same time becoming more deeply devoted to God and to my particular faith's guidance on life issues. It was a difficult time in my life and I found hope and a foundation in my faith. I was also undergoing infertility treatments for those years with a doctor outside of my health

system (my religious beliefs prevented me from using my own hospital's infertility treatments), and I was diligently monitoring every symptom my body relayed to me, checking multiple daily temperatures, etc., and being asked by my infertility physicians to monitor and report each medication, food and drink that I ingested over those years. This process of infertility treatment was difficult, consuming much time, out-of-pocket money and hope and grief over minute daily details. My infertility physician – who was not employed by my hospital system – preferred that I not take any other medical treatments at this time. This was particularly because typically months of surgeries, medicated cycles and diet changes would culminate into the best-chance months of fertility, and I was asked not to add more variables.

I strongly did not want to take the mandated flu vaccine those years. However, I felt I had no choice. Each time I did take the flu vaccine, it would throw off of my body's fertility symptoms, temperatures, etc. and an entire cycle or two would be unusable data for fertility purposes. I knew that no physician at my major medical system would advocate for me. I doubted that even the infertility physician would advocate for me, despite his feeling that I should not take additional medical interventions during that time. I quickly understood that no one wants to go up against the vaccine narrative.

I hesitatingly share this very personal story to show you that even as a medical professional myself, with valid physical concerns as well as faith based questions, I did not feel I could advocate for myself to be allowed to say “no” to a vaccine. The pressure to comply is strong. The option to decline seemed like a false option. Having tried to advocate on behalf of myself within the system in the past for the infertility treatment that my religion would permit - and having been utterly mocked and dismissed for my views - I felt strongly that any “documentation” I provided to say no to a vaccine would be equally dismissed.

I cannot imagine an average citizen would feel any more able to advocate on behalf of himself, let alone a child trying to get into college or any other school. Particularly this year, when so much propaganda and social pressure has been heaped onto all of us, and any dissenters have been censored into almost complete silence, we need the ability to think for ourselves. Something is very wrong with what is happening, and we as citizens need more power to be able to openly discuss our concerns with our physicians and to be able to decline the insertion of a medical intervention into our body, without later facing life-limiting and life-threatening discrimination.

You, representatives, are elected to have a wide focus on the holistic lives of all your constituents. Please advocate for us. Thank you.

Michelle Plecnika