

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and Members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 248.

My name is Karen Keefer, I am a Registered Nurse of 21 years this June and currently a stay-at-home mom. I have exhaustively researched COVID as many of my colleagues remained at the bedside during the pandemic. My background is in ICU and ER and my thought was if the call goes out in Ohio that all hands-on deck are needed, as it did in New York City, I want and need to know how to best treat my patients with this novel illness. I began to inquire where I would go locally should surges require those with my unique skill set. I quickly understood risk stratification was necessary and early treatment was essential for those high-risk individuals with multiple comorbidities. The call in Ohio never came and our best chance of truly stopping COVID mortality was halted in lieu of more expensive and newer to market therapeutics. No medical task forces were assigned with reviewing already FDA approved drugs to treat the novel virus. One colleague confided they had no idea what to prescribe for COVID patients, and practitioners throughout Ohio and the nation became islands unsure of how to effectively treat their patients.

I support HB 248 because as a healthcare professional informed consent, medical autonomy, and parental choice are the cornerstone of nursing ethics, advocacy, and activism. Weighing the risks and benefits of any intervention for oneself is the very definition of medical autonomy. Parental choice commits decision-making power to the parent their children to accept or decline medical treatment, intervention, and/or procedure. Informed consent is rooted in protecting the rights, health, and safety of the patient to choose for themselves to assume the risks of any offered intervention, treatment, or procedure. In assuming that risk healthcare professionals must be transparent. Life threatening effects of Idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP) due to the COVID vaccination are well documented, yet our Governor continues to tout the vaccination as “Safe and Effective” and “Our Greatest Weapon”. As a healthcare professional, I would challenge those statements and certainly have been fortunate enough to be outside of the mega health system and not concerned with maintaining my employment, as many of my colleagues, because my professional opinion diverges from the mega health systems. Our greatest weapon is diet, exercise, smoking cessation, weight reduction, a healthy immune system, and all other lifestyle modifications to promote wellness upstream.

These well-established ethical standards should never be infringed upon for mandates, to work and live, or to function within society. When we assume as a society to know for every individual what is best and “for the greater good”, we abuse the very trust our patients have placed in us. To advocate for patients means to allow them, free from my judgement, yours or anyone else’s, the ability to choose for themselves and their families how they wish to engage and how they wish not to engage the issue of vaccination.

Respectfully,

Karen Keefer, RN, BSN