

Proponent Testimony for House Bill 248
Ohio House Health Committee
June 3, 2021

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 House Bill 248.

My name is Kaela Vance, and I am a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor Supervisor in the state of Ohio. I am in strong support Ohio House Bill 248, and urge you to be, also.

Under the guise of public health, many businesses have stooped to the level of manipulation, bribery, and threats in an effort to coerce their employees and guests to comply with their “Covid rules”. We can look back in history and see this same phenomenon has occurred again and again – each time there is a period of healing and growth, where the people vow to “never again” let this happen, and yet here we are facing persecution because of our philosophical beliefs, religious convictions, or health concerns. In fact, some, including myself, have had to face this discrimination from their employers for years, related to employer required vaccinations. House Bill 248 is urgently needed to protect the citizens of this state from being discriminated against because of the choices that they make regarding the health of their own body and those of their children.

I have had the unfortunate experience over the last 5 years, to face this discrimination, regarding the annual Flu vaccination that has been required by my employer. What started out as a request for religious accommodation in my first year, quickly turned into more than that. By the next year, my simple letter, which still had to be approved, turned into a more invasive and coercive “interview” with Employee Health and my employer’s attorney. During that interview, I learned that they had never even read my request for religious accommodation letter. They also asked me a series of invasive questions as to the nature and extent of my religious beliefs. My understanding is that this type of questioning is a violation of federal law, but what is an employee like me to do? After that anxiety-provoking interview, my religious accommodation was “approved”, but I was required to wear a mask for the entire “declared” flu season whenever I was on work property. I was also instructed that I could not tell anyone why I was wearing the mask, or that I did not partake in the Flu vaccine, because that might encourage others not to get it as well. I would spend 3-5 months wearing this mask whenever around patients, most of them wondering why I was wearing it and thinking I was a “germaphobe”. Mind you, fast forward to Covid “rules”, I was no longer permitted to wear that same mask throughout the pandemic, despite the fact that it was better quality filtration than the surgical masks my employer was handing out at the door. Wearing the mask was very isolating. I had to keep to myself because I wore this “scarlet letter” across my face. I was not even allowed to talk to coworkers about why I was wearing a mask. I was not sick. In fact, I would go through the entire season healthy and no illness, while many of my coworkers were coming to work obviously ill with running noses and coughs. No one truly understands what that experience is like until you have to live through it.

Now, we are seeing the same thing happen throughout our State, not just in healthcare settings. Retailers have become the new mask and vaccine police. I experience fear and anxiety each day, not because of the virus, but because I never know what to expect, not just from my employer, but now also when I walk into a store or restaurant. At work I’ve had to worry whether I will have a job in a few months; or if I keep my job, what restrictions will be placed on me. Now I also worry outside of work, about being chased out of a store because I do not show proof of vaccination; or my children going to school and being discriminated against because they didn’t get a vaccine. I also worry about being able to see my family that don’t live nearby; If I’ll ever be able to take my children on a vacation; if I’ll be able to shop for my groceries in person or if I’ll eventually have to do all my shopping online; but generally, what will the world look like in 3 months, 1 year, 5 years from now; and so on.

Outside of myself, I also worry for my clients who I've witnessed decline mentally and emotionally over the last year. It doesn't matter what "side" they are on, all the children are suffering in some way – lack of peer interactions and structured environment; increase in parental and general stress; being sent home from school for every little ailment that normally would have been overlooked or, God forbid, considered with common sense; lack of interest in school due to needing to be self-managed; increased thoughts of self-harm; increased internet usage, including inappropriate connections being made; and so much more.

As each day passes, new policies are put into place aimed to separate the vaccinated from the unvaccinated, designed to coerce unvaccinated into complying with nonsensical public health policies. Should health officials be promoting things that actually keep you healthy – exercise, good food habits, hygiene, and so on? Why push vaccines and pharmaceuticals as "health promotion"? My husband and I feed our children healthy mostly organic foods, have them play outside in the fresh air and sun, and so on. Shouldn't those be the things that our health officials promote? How about less vaccines, better school lunches. Less vaccines, more physical education time at school. Less vaccines, time for students, or employees, to stay home when ill. Are there not better options for promoting health?

Any person, no matter their age, station, color, religion, sex, or medical status should not be discriminated against for any reason, and that should include employment or social penalties for not getting a vaccine, or any other medical procedure.

In the words of Edmund Burke, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing". Be one of the "good men" and vote yes on House Bill 248, to prevent our state from repeating history and promoting medical discrimination in the 21st century.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to provide testimony on the need for and urgency of House Bill 248.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kaela Vance". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kaela" being more prominent than the last name "Vance".

Kaela Vance