

May 22, 2021

The Honorable P. Scott Lipps
Chairman, House Health Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 South High Street, 13th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

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. Although stunned I would even need to compose a letter regarding individual medical autonomy and freedom in the United States of America, if this is the current fight we need to wage, I do so willingly and passionately.

I am the mother of one child and two adults with special needs. My adult sons have Autism, and my young daughter has Epilepsy. I have never needed to disclose their special needs during the course of their lives more than I have been required to do within the last year. The confidentiality of their diagnoses, medical information, and accommodations has always been taken for granted by myself and them. I have found this privacy to be essential in allowing them the dignity to live their lives without fear of discrimination, and without fear of prejudice, both of which could deny them the opportunities afforded their "typical" peers. Equality is a goal we take very seriously in our home, and we always assume it is the goal of our general community. However, the current vaccine pressure in Ohio, manipulated by the fear-mongering and dictatorial overreach of our state's current administration, is endangering this goal for all Ohioans, including my children.

The tightrope we walk in our household is tenuous: what is a solution for one of my children is a problem for another. The diagnosis of my sons might seem identical, but their levels of function, sensory afflictions, and capabilities are completely different, and are almost polar opposites. This is also true of their medical needs. I have always made medical decisions based on the individual child, not the diagnosis. To say medical decisions are "one-size-fits-all" is wrong, unintelligent, and insulting. Each decision we make must be researched, thoughtfully discussed, and tailored to the specific needs of the child. If not, the overall health and well-being of the child could be compromised, and more stress could be introduced to an already burdened, overwhelmed, and unique neurology. I do my due diligence in every medical decision I make for my children, I advocate for them, and I have taught them to advocate for themselves. This is the beauty of the medical freedom and choice we hold as a constitutional right in the United States.

The decision of whether, or not, my children will get the vaccine is a serious one, and one we are currently discussing and considering. However, the decision is OURS to make, and should be as personal and private as all other personal medical information. The possibility of discrimination because of NOT acquiescing to a vaccine SHOULD NOT be a factor in our already complicated medical

decision-making process. The threat of not being permitted to fully engage in society or commerce because of an impairment which precludes one from being able to accept a government mandated medical intervention, due to NO FAULT of the individual, SHOULD NOT be a factor in the medical decision-making of ANY Ohioan. Medical decisions belong to the PERSON, not the GOVERNMENT. Autonomy is a constitutional right guaranteed to every American.

I appeal to this committee to end the discrimination waged against the special needs community by Ohio's current administration. The last year has been a nightmare for this population. They have repeatedly been the victims of mandates targeting their vulnerabilities: masks, social distancing, the cancellation of programs, schools, opportunities, and trainings. These overreaching mandates, supposedly imposed to "protect the vulnerable," have ravaged the lives and essential routines of THIS population of "vulnerables", and have caused a regression it will take YEARS from which to recover. So, do as has been directed by the current governor: protect the vulnerable! Please stand up and defend the defenseless, give a voice to the silenced, and advocate for those unable to advocate for themselves by supporting, voting for, and passing HB248. My children, along with thousands of other Ohioans in the special needs community, need to start their recovery process from damage already inflicted during the past year, and need us to prevent further damage from being done to their already altered life trajectories. This bill would allow them to regain the respect they so rightfully deserve, and so desperately need, by having their medical rights and privacy protected by the passage of HB248.

Thank you for your time and your attention to my plea of supporting this pro-American, pro-Constitution, and pro-PEOPLE bill, HB248.

Kerry Elliott Lorkovic