

Pastor Bobby Mitchell, EXPERT WITNESS 6/1/21

Topic: Respecting Religious and Natural Immunity objections to Vaccine Mandates

Chairman Lipps and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 248.

I am a retired Air Force Veteran, husband, father, and pastor of Canal Winchester's Father's House International Church.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted our nation in ways we never imagined. Schools closed, businesses were ordered shut, and life as we knew it had changed. But the spirit of our great Buckeye State showed itself true. As founder of Southeastern Ohio's largest drive-thru food pantry, The Father's Kitchen, I launched into action and took every recommended safety precaution to ensure we were in compliance with health and safety standards.

I am also the father of three beautiful children, all of whom have been fully immunized.

So I'm not what we now colloquially refer to as an *anti-vaxxer*. I support the U.S. Supreme Court's [*Jacobsen vs Massachusetts*](#) decision that confirmed a state's "right to protect itself against an epidemic of disease which threatens the safety of its members."

What I also support is extending religious and natural immunity vaccine exemptions that exist for children, to adults as well, and even more so as it relates to COVID vaccines that are still under emergency use.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, religious institutions were systematically targeted and later vindicated by the Supreme Court who, when ruling against New York's haphazardly-imposed rules, said:

"They are far more restrictive than any COVID-related regulations that have previously come before the Court, much tighter than those adopted by many other jurisdictions hard-hit by the pandemic, and far more severe than has been shown to be required to prevent the spread of the virus at the applicants' services."

Without protections in place, our state runs the risk of being another New York.

The whole idea behind vaccine mandates is that they move us towards *herd immunity*, a necessary point at which a majority of the population is either vaccinated or develop natural immunities against an infectious disease.

But recent comments by President Biden's chief medical adviser, Dr. Anthony Fauci, about COVID-19 *herd immunity* now being an elusive goal; the White House's refusal to answer whether it still considers getting there realistic and achievable; and that we don't yet know how long immunity to the virus lasts, should challenge every Member to seriously consider how much liberty they are willing to forego.

Critics of vaccine choice argue that it allows a system where for selfish reasons, "free-riders" who refuse the vaccine, will benefit from the vaccination of others.

While that possibility is not guaranteed, the nation's top Health and Human Services agency (HHS) has studied the concept of conscientious objection and found that by having the proper structures in place, the threat to public health is severely minimized.

Most citizens frequently consult with their physician and healthcare professionals on decisions regarding vaccination and other medical procedures and there is no reason to believe they would not do so regarding COVID-19 or any other vaccine that may be strongly encouraged. HB 248 does not prevent any public health agency or physician from encouraging or providing plenty of educational resources or counseling on the risks and benefits of vaccination.

As demonstrated in this pandemic, most citizens also stay home when they are sick and are willing to quarantine for whatever number of days a particular virus is contagious. Understanding that the majority of the population is considerate of others, there is no reason to believe they would be a threat to the community any more than they would be for an illness we do not currently have a vaccine for.

The state of Ohio should not be opposed to allowing citizens to object to vaccination on religious and natural immunity grounds. The founding of this nation rests on the ability to exercise freedom of religious beliefs and respecting these objections do not threaten public health.

While respecting religious and natural immunity objections are extremely important, I did want to highlight other aspects of HB-248 that equally deserve your support. This bill:

- Ensures discrimination against the unvaccinated is not enshrined into law
- Protects business owners that follow the law
- Prohibits public disclosure and requesting of a person's vaccine status
- And also requires schools notify parents of existing school mandates and any laws providing exemptions

Are these expectations any more burdensome than for those who object to vaccinations? No. They protect our privacy, are not unreasonable asks nor do they, in the case of schools, supersede existing mandates already in the Ohio code.

Johnson & Johnson used lab-grown fetal cell "lines" created from "cell cultures" that were taken from aborted babies back in the 70's and 80's surely this committee can see how a reasonable person would

not want to inject themselves with that on both a moral and religious objection. Many Christians, Jews, Muslims and other religions strongly believe that the immune system given to them by God is better than injecting themselves with any man-made products, and that belief should also be respected in America.

In spite of just how partisan our politics have become, here is opportunity for this body to show that Ohio really does know how to move forward, together. This can be done.

I encourage each of you to preserve our liberties and vote **Yes** on HB-248.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Dr. Bobby L. Mitchell

Pastor, Father's House International Church