

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 Joanna Overholt and I am a registered nurse and nurse practitioner student. The reason I support House Bill 248 is because I had a severe reaction to my 3rd mandatory flu shot required by Metrohealth in 2018. My previous employers let us refuse the vaccine, but required us to wear an ineffective, symbolic mask through flu season. We should not be discriminated against or punished for refusing vaccines.

Metro allowed to us to apply for religious vaccine exemptions, but it was explained to me they will terminate those who don't get the vaccine; religious exemptions are never approved, only medical. Even a previous allergic to the flu shot was not enough for a flu exemption. In fact, it was very difficult to get MY medical exemption. For allergic reactions to the flu shots, employees had to get allergy tested, and they still were required to get a different form of flu vaccine. A nurse who went through this stated the alternate vaccine was "made from dog kidneys instead of chicken eggs". She had allergy testing done, was still required to get a different form the flu shot, and had a reaction again to the flu shot, before she was granted a medical exemption.

My 3rd annual flu shot since starting my employment there was November 5, 2018, and it was my last flu shot. Approximately 2 weeks after my vaccine, I began having excruciating joint pain in every joint unrelieved by high dose Motrin or Tylenol; my back pain became severe and caused me to cry at work; I had numbness/tingling in my fingers & toes; my kidneys hurt and I'd wake from sleep due to the kidney pain; my skin around my fingernails rashed, was peeling off (I thought from hand sanitizer); I even had an entire finger randomly swell, become itchy, red and painful.

I saw my doctor around 3 weeks after the flu shot on November 30. My doctor DID NOT identify my reaction, nor order the correct tests to diagnose a flu shot reaction, and referred me to a spine doctor. He had my records showing my recent flu shot, he SHOULD have known how to diagnose it. *(My doctor only ordered the basic metabolic panel, urine tests; but tested vitamin B12, thyroid test. I later found out proper tests would have been complete blood count with differential, erythrocyte sedimentation rate, C-reactive protein, total hemolytic complement (CH50), C3, C4, basic metabolic panel, liver transaminases, antinuclear antibody, and rheumatoid factor.)*

May 2019, I followed up with my primary doctor and I still had the joint pain, peeling fingers, and I was concerned about having an autoimmune disease. I asked if it could be the flu shot that was causing my problems. He confirmed it sounded like I had a reaction to the shot and referred me to a rheumatologist. After my doctor stated it could be vaccine-related, I searched for research about my symptoms. Sure enough, I had symptoms similar to SERUM SICKNESS, a Type III immune-mediated hypersensitivity reaction that presents usually 4-14 days post exposure. The three main symptoms of serum sickness include fever, rash, and painful swollen joints. (Research attached)

In July, 8 MONTHS after my reaction started, I saw a rheumatologist who ordered appropriate autoimmune labs. They came up negative, but he explained I would have needed to be tested during the reaction, not 8 months later, to actually diagnose it.

Between the medical error and inadequate labs, my primary doctor and rheumatologist (both Metro doctors) literally refused to write me a flu shot exemption and I would have been forced to get another flu shot. I wondered if it was organization loyalty/against company policy, or if they would be red-flagged for doing so; Because, what was the big deal? I had to go 'out-of-organization' to a doctor who would write an exemption after reviewing this information. Metro required me to write a narrative story about why I should get an exemption and required the doctor write a narrative, and then submit everything for exemption approval; a simple doctor's note was not enough. My 'out-of-organization' doctor told me what Metro asked for from her was illegal, that she would not write a narrative about my protected health information. She wrote on a RX pad simply that I was not to have the flu vaccine. I submitted my narrative, her RX, and luckily my exemption was approved.

MEDICAL ERRORS 3RD LEADING CAUSE OF DEATH ACCORDING TO JOHN HOPKINS. What would have happened if I got another shot? How many others has this happened to? How many doctors/practitioners know the flu shot, and other vaccines can cause reactions weeks after vaccination like serum sickness or kidney failure- and how to test for it? Unfortunately, I believe most doctors/practitioners/nurses are unaware of many adverse effects from vaccines, nor do they actually know how to identify a reaction like mine; instead, they are trained mostly on 'potential benefits'. I've noticed much adverse info is left out medical education books, the CDC site, and seems oddly hidden. Most the research articles are also locked/require payment to access. Therefore, vaccine injuries are most likely severely under-identified, and under-reported.

This is why HB 248 needs to become law. We need vaccine choice without discrimination. We cannot allow medical organizations blackball and control exemptions. Physicians shouldn't choose to be loyal to their organization over a patient's safety. Yes, vaccines can and do make some sick, but more importantly it is not identified/missed by those responsible for their care. We need to make our own vaccine choices moving forward.

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

Sincerely,

Joanna Overholt, BSN, RN

References:

1. Apisarnthanarak A, Uyeki TM, Miller ER, Mundy LM. Serum sickness-like reaction associated with inactivated influenza vaccination among Thai health care personnel: risk factors and outcomes. *Clinical infectious diseases: an official publication of the Infectious Diseases Society of America*. 2009;49(1):e18-22. Epub 2009/06/02. doi: 10.1086/599615. PubMed PMID: 19480578. <https://academic.oup.com/cid/article/49/1/e18/373390>

2. Bonds RS, Kelly BC. Severe serum sickness after H1N1 influenza vaccination. *Am J Med Sci*. 2013;345(5):412-3. Epub 2012/12/12. doi: 10.1097/MAJ.0b013e318273de7f. PubMed PMID: 23221512. <https://www.aaaai.org/Allergist-Resources/Ask-the-Expert/Answers/Old-Ask-the-Experts/influ>

“With increasing numbers of patients receiving this vaccine, even rare adverse reactions may be experienced by numerous individuals.”

3. Chiong FJ, Loewenthal M, Boyle M, Attia J. Serum sickness-like reaction after influenza vaccination. *BMJ Case Rep*. 2015;2015. Epub 2015/12/18. doi: 10.1136/bcr-2015-211917. PubMed PMID: 26677148; PMCID: PMC4691861. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4691861/>

“individuals who receive the vaccine may have adverse events. A retrospective cohort study performed in Thailand revealed 14 of 495 healthcare personnel (3%) who received influenza vaccination developed SSLR postvaccination. This case report further suggests that individuals may suffer adverse events to a vaccine that is generally effective”

4. Study Suggests Medical Errors Now Third Leading Cause of Death in the U.S.
Release Date: May 3, 2016

https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/media/releases/study_suggests_medical_errors_now_third_leading_cause_of_death_in_the_us