

June 2, 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:

As a descendant of a family who was negatively impacted by vaccination discrimination, I urge you to pass House Bill 248. The following is our story of how vaccine discrimination and mandatory vaccinations devastated my great uncle's life.

Ralph Bowser and his wife, Marguerite Roth Bowser, were both deeply religious. Ralph was raised by Dunkards and German Baptists in Bedford County, Pennsylvania. Ralph came to Ohio as a young man when his mother and step-father moved to Dayton. Ralph established a produce-stand business in Dayton. He became well-known in the community as "Pop Bowser."

In the early 1940's, the Dayton public schools made vaccination mandatory for all students. Ralph chose to withdraw his two children, Louise and Ralph Jr., from public school and school them at home. Unfortunately, home-schooling was illegal at that time in Dayton. Public authorities told Ralph was to move out of Dayton if he wished his children to remain unvaccinated. Ralph and Marguerite chose to stay despite the persecution because Dayton was their home and the location of Ralph's business.

In 1941, Ralph and Marguerite were charged with failing to enroll their children in public school. Ralph was sentenced to six months in the county workhouse. Marguerite was placed in a mental hospital because there was no women's jail facility at that time. Ralph and Marguerite's two children were placed in the Shawen Acres Children's Home of Montgomery County because none of his immediate family was able to take them. Ralph's brother, my great-grandfather, Harvey Bowser, already had his hands full caring for his wife, who was ill. Ralph's mother, Sarah Geiser, was ill also, and she passed away in 1941.

Ralph went on a hunger strike in response to the unjust treatment of his family. In response to Ralph's fast, the workhouse assigned him to work in the kitchen and tried various means to tempt him into eating. Failing to break Ralph's fast by temptation, the court then ordered Ralph to a hospital to be force fed on the 28th day of his fast.

Ralph's case made national headlines. Many newspapers portrayed Ralph as an anti-social religious fanatic and claimed his children were barely educated—which was not true. His daughter, Louise, later remembered her parents' deep faith and gentle ways. Louise remembered her mother teaching her brother and her. She recalled that Shawen Acres tested her to determine her grade level and that she qualified to be in the same grade as her age-mates. Louise also remembered that Shawen Acres vaccinated both her brother and her against their will and separated her from her brother. Louise missed her parents very much during her time at Shawen Acres.

Eventually, both Ralph and Marguerite were released. Marguerite would not speak of her treatment in the mental hospital, but her family said she was never the same after her experience—mentally broken. Ralph and Marguerite were not able to bring their children home for a long time.

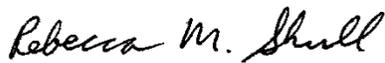
Thus, Ralph Bowser, a former U.S. Marine and heavyweight wrestler, and his wife and family were damaged mentally, physically, and financially, because they objected to vaccination and were discriminated against and persecuted because of their choices and beliefs.

Here in Ohio the Ohio Legislature passed laws providing exemptions from vaccination because of cases like Ralph's. Let us not repeat the past. Prevent similar injustices in the future.

I have attached a few of the numerous newspaper clippings and documents related to Ralph's case for your reference.

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 cursive script that reads "Rebecca M. Shull". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Rebecca Shull

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