

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 Carol M. Siebenaller. I am a RN, BSN. The reason I support House Bill 248 is because of a personal experience I endured regarding being forced to take certain vaccines if I wanted to be employed.

First of all, I would like to say that I have always been a very healthy individual. I worked for Heartland Home Care company for 14 years. No requirement was in place to receive the flu vaccine at this agency. I needed only to sign a waiver if I did not want to receive the vaccine. This company closed. As a result, I sought home care nursing with a different company, ProMedica. In order to be hired for employment with ProMedica I was forced to receive not only the flu vaccine, which I had chosen to not receive in the past, but also a MMR vaccine. I would not have been forced to receive the MMR vaccine if I could have provided proof that I had previously received the vaccine. Even though I had previously received the MMR vaccine, I could not provide the proof due to the fact that the physician who provided the vaccine to me was no longer in practice and I had no access to those records.

I asked ProMedica if I could wear a mask during the flu season instead of getting the flu shot. ProMedica gave a very definitive answer that it was mandatory for me to take the flu vaccine if I wanted employment with them. So, I took both flu and MMR vaccines on 11/22/2013.

Almost immediately, I began experiencing debilitating migraines. Never before in my life had I experienced debilitating migraine headaches. During the next three months I worked on a contingency basis as I was able and as they had work for me. However, when I worked, it was very difficult due to the severity of the migraines. A majority of my time during those months I was at home, in a dark, quiet room, trying to decrease the pain as much as possible. During this time, I was being seen by my primary care physician (PCP), trying different medications, which did not work, to alleviate the migraines but did cause other adverse reactions. My PCP finally referred me to a neurologist whom I continue to see to this day. Much of the time ProMedica did not have much work for me. When they asked me to work again, I was not able to work their schedule for me. They told me I needed to report to work or I could not work for them. While they would say I quit working for them, I believe I was fired because I wanted to work, but could not due to the migraines that began happening immediately after they forced me to get the two vaccines. In all, I was under ProMedica's employment for about one year.

In late 2014 I received a phone call from Heartland Hospice asking me if I would consider coming to work for them. I agreed and began working for them in January 2015 on per diem basis as a hospice nurse. I worked for them for nearly five years, finding this work extremely rewarding. It was more of a ministry to me than a job. However, after Heartland was bought out by ProMedica, they began requiring flu shots for employees. Of course I could not take the flu vaccine again after the adverse events I experienced after taking the first one. They did offer that I could wear a mask at all times from October to May. While they required that I, and other team members that did not want the shot, to wear masks at all times when at the patients' homes and while in the office, they did not require vendors, sales representatives and others visiting the office to follow the same protocols. In my view, this was discriminatory and made it difficult for me to continue to work for them. Rather than get the flu shot, I decided to retire early at the end of December 2019 rather than taking the flu shot and risking more harm to myself with more adverse events from taking the flu shot again. I also did not want to be discriminated against again by being forced to wear a mask, even in the office (not near any patients),

where other people such as delivery persons, visitors, etc...could come and go freely without question of having had the flu vaccine.

Frankly, I believe in health care privacy. I believe the vendors and others coming and going at the ProMedica office, or any other business, should not be required to disclose their vaccination status to whomever requests it because of a business requirement or other reasons. We worry about discrimination in so many other areas of our lives and take steps to prevent or mitigate discrimination. We should take steps to do the same for those who cannot or choose not to get flu shots or any other type of vaccines. Ohioans should have the freedom to do what's medically best for them and not be discriminated against for doing so. Healthcare privacy and freedom is important for all.

If House Bill 248 had been in place in 2013, I could have had the freedom to decline the flu and MMR vaccines and avoided years of unnecessary, debilitating migraine headaches, adverse reactions to medications, lost time at work, and most importantly could still be helping people, both patients and their families, through their journey at the end of life in hospice care.

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

Sincerely,

Carol M Siebenaller