

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 Kristen Smith and I am a self-employed homeschooling mom in favor of HB248. I support this bill for a variety of reasons.

Though vaccination can be a contentious issue, freedom shouldn't be. This bill allows all Ohioans to freely choose what is injected into their bodies, and subsequently can never be removed, without fear of losing jobs or being denied equal access to services and businesses in our state. These things happened once in our country prior to the Civil Rights era and we would do future generations a monumental disservice by allowing them to happen again.

Already in these post-pandemic months we are seeing threats of segregation and discrimination based on vaccination status. These practices have no place in a free society. While the majority of people choose to use vaccines in their healthcare, others feel some or all vaccines are not in their best interest based on legitimate medical reasons or deeply held reasons of faith and conscience. While we may have the freedom to choose all, some, or no vaccines in our state, this freedom means nothing if someone can be fired, excluded, or otherwise discriminated against for their choices. Coercion is a poor way to make informed medical choices, and I don't believe anyone who believes in our Constitution wants to return to an era when groups of people are asked to "show their papers."

Some may suggest that allowing people to choose what is or is not injected into their bodies puts other people, particularly those with compromised immune systems, at risk. I would suggest that it is not feasible nor wise for businesses and the government to make healthcare decisions for anyone, and that those individuals with compromised immune systems best know how to protect their own health. This bill keeps healthcare decisions between individuals and their healthcare team where it belongs and prevents the government and corporations from forcing their preferences onto others.

Finally, our health information should be private, and this bill helps ensure it stays that way. In my own family, my teenage son has been told that he needs to continue to wear a mask to his sports practice because he has not taken an emergency-authorized vaccine. This is despite the fact that our family had and recovered from Covid19 in the fall of 2020. His private health information is on display if he must wear a mask to practice while others go without. It is wrong to separate people as safe and unsafe based on their personal medical decisions, especially when they aren't even sick. HB248 would prevent this type of activity and others like it.

In conclusion, I believe that HB248 protects Ohioans from coercive tactics that might make them feel forced to receive a medical treatment that goes against their sincerely held beliefs or may even be harmful for them. It doesn't discourage vaccination and still leaves employers able to present information and even encourage vaccination if they believe it is in the best interest of their employees.

Given that vaccination is a medical procedure with some level of risk, that medical decisions are never one-size-fits-all and are best made between an individual and his or her healthcare provider, and that medical information should be private, Ohio would do well to protect the freedom of vaccine choice for its citizens. I would again emphasize that this choice means nothing if citizens can lose their jobs, lose access to businesses and services, or be otherwise ostracized from society for making those choices.

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

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