

June 15, 2021
Opponent Testimony – HB 248
House Health Committee

Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo and Members of the Committee

As long-time American Cancer Society volunteers and members of ACS CAN, thank you for allowing us to express our opinion in opposition of House Bill 248 and affirm our support of the ACS CAN position.

We are proud Cleveland residents and we present our comments from the vantage point of a cancer survivor (my husband, James D. Bond) and his spouse, caregiver (Kathleen M. Bond)

Jim was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma, an incurable blood cancer and was told that he had 2-3 years to live, if everything went well. We heard that diagnosis **29** years ago! Multiple chemo regimens, total body radiation, multiple targeted radiations, multiple metal implants to support bones and four bone marrow transplants over the course of 29 years have us knowing only too well what it takes to fight cancer. We are fortunate that we have had access to leading-edge care and found it close to home most of the time. Ten years into Jim's treatment saga, we ran out of options and had to travel 600 miles from home to access a 9-month clinical trial in Boston. Access to that trial resulted not only in saving Jim's life, but also helped a novel treatment gain FDA approval and become a standard of care for myeloma. We had the resources to stay in another city, but it was a lonely, frightening situation to be far from the love and support of family and friends.

Prior to that crucial trial, I had been an active volunteer with the ACS Cleveland Hope Lodge and knew how vital the lodge was in enabling cancer patients to have access to care at Cleveland's top cancer centers. The Cleveland Hope Lodge has offered refuge to over 7,000 patients in the last 25 years and they have come from all over Ohio and many states beyond. The Lodge provides a home-like atmosphere where people enter as strangers, but they leave as family. Our volunteers are essential to helping patients navigate the experience of cancer treatment while being miles away from the support of family, friends and community.

Due to the pandemic many cancer patients had to delay or forgo treatment and our Hope Lodges across the country were necessarily closed. Now there is pent-up demand for our lodges to re-open and enable patients to resume or begin essential life-sustaining treatment regimens. Cancer patients in Ohio were not at the front of the line, when it came to getting the COVID vaccines. There is little data now regarding how much protection they may have after vaccination. Many patients are immune compromised because of the disease process, cancer treatments and/or bone marrow transplants. We are both fully vaccinated, but Jim is immune-compromised and as such, still at a high risk for COVID. It is essential that everyone around him has been vaccinated and we continue to limit our contacts to necessary medical appointments. Medical facilities are maintaining COVID protocols and certainly Hope Lodge must operate by mitigating risk for cancer patients. Fresh or dried flowers aren't even allowed in our lodges, as they can carry mold and fungus. Certainly, it is an imperative that our staff and volunteers be vaccinated so we can provide a level of protection that begins at our threshold.

It is daunting enough to be away from home for cancer treatments, but it would be especially risky and upsetting if we have staff that are not vaccinated. We urge you to vote against HB 248 as it puts a very vulnerable patient population at great risk. We endorse the defeat of HB 248.

Thank you!

James D. & Kathleen M. Bond
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