



**Opposition Testimony from the Ohio Society for Respiratory Care on
Sub. HB 248: Vaccine Choice and Anti-Discrimination Act
Before the House Health Committee
June 15, 2021**

Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo and distinguished members of the House Health Committee. My name is Sue Ciarlariello and I have been an Ohio Respiratory Therapist for 44 years. I am here today representing the Ohio Society for Respiratory Care (OSRC), the state professional organization representing nearly 9,000 licensed Respiratory Care Professionals in Ohio. Respiratory Therapists continue to be on the frontline with doctors and nurses managing those infected with COVID 19. Our respiratory care workforce has been strained, battered and placed in harm's way by the extreme volume and demands of the worst respiratory pandemic in our lifetime. In severe cases, COVID-19 causes extreme lung inflammation requiring mechanical ventilation and critical instability for a prolonged period, before recovery or death. The COVID vaccine is the only weapon which can combat the spread, lower the severity of the disease and its associated hospitalization and mortality. Hospitals are now reporting that current patients hospitalized with acute COVID have consistently been the non-vaccinated.

The choice to take the COVID vaccine is still optional, not mandatory. So why is a bill like HB 248 even necessary? Ohio already allows parents/patients to opt out of any vaccines with a medical, religious or philosophical belief. This bill seems to promote less compliance with vaccines and discourages the use of protection, such as the simple use of a face mask, in known or potential situations of exposure. This bill defies logic in its plan to prioritize the individual over proven community infection control practices to prevent outbreaks and reduce the transmission of communicable diseases. Health care facilities, schools, day care centers and mass transit authorities will lose the opportunity to protect their customers and employees.

HB 248 puts all Ohio children at risk. Childhood vaccines have kept children safe for many years due to the significant number of vaccinated. The prevalence of measles, diphtheria, pertussis, varicella and tetanus is low at this time. However, if less children are vaccinated, outbreaks will occur and these lethal diseases will cause an increase in preventable childhood death and disability. Vaccines can prevent a lifetime of disability and trauma for families and lessen the strain on health care providers.

Our health system does not have unlimited resources to manage an increased caseload of these preventable diseases on top of the normal acute and chronic conditions hospitals see. And our health care workers, including respiratory therapists, do not deserve chronic exposure to potentially fatal diseases which are easily preventable with vaccines.

Working in hospitals, we see firsthand the value of immunization for our patients, our co-workers and visitors. We also value masking, gowning, gloving and air filtration devices as protocol to protect ourselves. Hospital workers and visitors respecting infection control procedures assure that transmission is minimized.

Therefore, we respectfully urge you to reject HB 248 on the mere fact that it will not only strain Ohio's healthcare system, but it will also result in needless death and chronic disability, particularly among our youth.

Please use the below contact information if you have questions, thank you very much.

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