



Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and Members of the House Health Committee, thank you sincerely for the opportunity to provide testimony on *House Bill 248* (HB-248).

My name is Jareen Meizen-Derr and I am a pediatric epidemiologist at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. I stand in opposition to HB-248, a bill that fully stands against the health and well-being of Ohioans (particularly our most vulnerable populations). I have devoted my professional life pursuing how to improve the life and well-being of children and their families. Over the years, few bills have come through for debate which would be detrimental to life in the way that HB-248 is poised to do.

Although HB-248 purports to uphold choice and prevent discrimination, it will inadvertently, or perhaps advertently, stand to discriminate against those who are not eligible for or able to participate in key public health activities. Over the years, many physicians in my institution have treated many children with illnesses preventable with vaccination. Our doctors care for infants hospitalized with pertussis (or whooping cough) who spent weeks to months in the hospital, including stays in the intensive care unit. We have cared for children with influenza who developed pneumonias that required intubation and mechanical ventilation. And, not to forget, we have supported children dealing with either acute COVID-19 or Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C) following a previous infection with SARS-CoV-2. Nearly all these children, were too young to be vaccinated and were around others who were unvaccinated. Although we all stand to benefit from vaccines and other public health measures, **children feel their effects most acutely.**

Vaccines and public health measures like masking represent some of the most safe and effective strategies we have at keeping children and communities healthy. Because of such strategies, children now live to adulthood, free from infectious diseases which previously wiped out scores. Moreover, because of such strategies, we are finally seeing the promise of the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, a scourge that has killed nearly 20,000 Ohioans. The science is clear with study after study underscoring the degree to which benefit outweighs the risk. The opposite is true of this bill. **The risks HB-248 could promulgate – more lethal yet preventable disease, morbidity experienced disproportionately by children, diminution of science in favor of politics – dramatically outweigh any perceived benefits.**

Please do the right thing and **stop HB248-11.**

Sincerely,



Jareen Meizen-Derr



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