



Opponent Testimony HB 248
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Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in opposition of House Bill 248. My name is Kristin Englund, MD, and I am President of the Academy of Medicine of Cleveland and Northern Ohio (AMCNO). I am also a practicing infectious disease physician and Director of a clinic for long-haul COVID-19 patients at a major health system in Cleveland.

The Academy of Medicine of Cleveland & Northern Ohio (AMCNO), founded in 1824, is the region's professional medical association, and the oldest professional association in Ohio. We are a non-profit 501(c)6 representing physicians and medical students from all the contiguous counties in Northern Ohio. We are proud to be the stewards of Cleveland's medical community of the past, present and future.

The mission of the Academy of Medicine of Cleveland & Northern Ohio is to support physicians in being strong advocates for all patients and promote the practice of the highest quality of medicine. On behalf of our physician members and their patients, we ask you to oppose HB 248.

We are proud members of the Ohio Champions for Vaccines (OC4V) coalition established by the Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. OC4V members are a coalition of medical and public health groups, parents and caregivers, and other invested stakeholders to reduce barriers to vaccines, distribute accurate, science-based immunization information, and encourage evidence-based vaccine policy.

There is no question that vaccines are the greatest public health invention of our time. They have allowed us to diminish and, in some cases, eradicate the threat of fatal infectious diseases. There is also no question that routine childhood immunizations have helped save lives.

The World Health Organization¹ estimates that vaccines annually prevent almost 6 million deaths worldwide. And in the United States there has been a 99% decrease in incidence for the nine diseases for which childhood vaccines have been recommended for decades.

Vaccines not only protect the immunized but can also reduce disease among unimmunized individuals in the community through “indirect effects” or “herd protection.” Vaccines are most effective when a substantial percentage of the community is vaccinated. In the last 50 years alone, vaccines have helped to nearly wipe out measles, diphtheria, and polio.

And as we have devastatingly experienced over the past 18 months, life without even one vaccine, in the face of a contagious disease, can have incredible moral and economic consequences. As of June 10, 2021, 33.4 million Americans have been diagnosed with COVID-19, and over 598,000 have died. And as I have seen in my practice, nearly 1/3 of COVID-19 survivors are still experiencing symptoms of long-haul COVID-19.

Thanks to the development of the COVID-19 vaccinations, however, and with 58% of American adults with at least one-dose of the vaccine, COVID-19 deaths in the U.S. have tumbled to an average of around 600 per day — the lowest level in 10 months. Without the aggressive vaccination campaign launched over the past few months, this drop in mortality would not have been possible. Once again, we have shown that vaccines save lives.

It is also important to note that there is substantial oversight of vaccines in the United States by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). FDA’s mission is to protect and promote the public health, both in the U.S. and globally, by ensuring the safety and effectiveness of drug products including ensuring the quality, safety, and effectiveness of vaccines.

In addition to this oversight, it is important to note that Ohio’s existing laws in this space already provide families with medical, religious, and philosophical exemptions to opt out of vaccinations.

It is for all these reasons that we stand in opposition of HB 248. We believe that this bill could cause irrevocable harm by diminishing the rates of both adult and childhood vaccinations in our community, putting all Ohioans at risk.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important issue. I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/2/07-040089/en/>