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House Health Committee
Written Testimony on House Bill 284
June 15, 2021

Chairman Lipps, Ranking Member Russo and Members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written opponent testimony on House Bill 248.

Centerpoint Health is a federally qualified health center (FQHC) serving the Middletown, Franklin, and Norwood communities in Ohio. As an FQHC, we are dedicated to providing primary care, dental care, behavioral health, OB/GYN, and outreach services to the underserved in these communities on a sliding fee scale. We have a strong focus on pediatric care.

I am a pediatrician and the Chief Medical Officer for Centerpoint Health and have been serving families in this community since 2014. I am a strong advocate for childhood immunizations and, while I am proud of our immunization rates, I am always striving to improve them. We welcome all families and patients regardless of immunization status. Studies show that having a conversation with a physician or primary care provider has a strong impact on immunization decisions. I have seen this is true. I have conversations with families on a daily basis regarding immunizations risks and benefits. These are conversations with concerned parents who are sifting through an overwhelming amount of information and misinformation regarding vaccines and trying to make the safest choices for their children. I practice shared decision making with these families and offer reliable resources, sometimes over several visits or years before they decide to get their children vaccinated. These conversations are critical for children, their families, and our community, and HB 248 is threatening this communication.

HB 248 is over-reaching legislation taking aim at vaccines. It has been framed as a bill to stop the COVID-19 vaccines from becoming mandatory (which today is completely voluntary), but it would actually apply to ALL immunizations, including childhood vaccines. If passed, this legislation has the potential to reverse decades of immunity from life-threatening, but vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, mumps, hepatitis, meningitis, and tuberculosis.

Vaccines are safe and effective, but only if the majority of Ohioans get them. Ohio's vaccine rates are already among the lowest in the US. Low vaccination rates put all children at risk. This bill also creates a disincentive for parents to maintain their child's health through routine provider well-visits and immunizations, which threatens not only the health of all Ohioans, but our economy and way of life. The conversations I have with parents and the associated well-



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child visits are often initiated by a school nurse or daycare provider notifying parents that immunizations are due. They are referred to our Health Center for vaccines or reminded to follow up with me as their Primary Care Provider. During these visits we discuss vaccines and administer them if the parent consents, but we also discuss nutrition, bike helmets, physical activity, screen for depression, lead poisoning, and for normal developmental milestones depending on the age of the child. All of these screenings will also be impacted by this bill.

Ohio already has vaccine exemptions in place and current law allows for parental/personal choice. Ohio law allows for parents to opt out of any or all vaccines for medical reasons, religious or philosophical beliefs. With these exemptions in place, HB 248 is not needed.

On behalf of Centerpoint Health and the patients we serve, I respectfully request that you reject HB 248 to protect the vitality of Ohio's children and families and avoid disastrous consequences for the future of our state. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jennifer Feldman, CMO
Centerpoint Health