

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in opposition to House Bill 248. My name is Dr. Sean Gallagher and I am a Primary Care Pediatrician in Newark, Ohio.

In my practice, I provide care for around 3,000 children each year. As a pediatrician, I have dedicated my life to the care of children. Immunizations play a vital role in my work. I can tell you that of the 15+ diseases we routinely vaccinate against, I have only seen single cases of 3 or 4 of them; immunizations represent a triumph of humanity over the horrors of disease.

I work with several families that choose to limit the vaccines their children receive. Every physician understands that a child is best served when their parents and their doctor work together as a team. I would never coerce or force a patient to undergo a medical procedure or to receive an immunization.

Proponents of House Bill 248 have alleged that patients are being forced to receive a vaccine. This is inaccurate and offensive to providers like me who care deeply for our patients. Patient informed consent is critical, and I work every day to ensure the Ohioans I care for are informed about all aspects of their care.

House Bill 248 would dramatically expand vaccine exemptions for children entering school or a state-licensed childcare centers. Do you know how easy it already is in our state to be exempted from vaccination in these cases? A parent only has to print a slip of paper from the Ohio Department of Health, sign it, and provide it to their school district.

Additionally, the bill places new restrictions on hospitals and businesses that would place patients, customers, and employees at risk. This prevents hospitals and other healthcare facilities from taking any steps to control the spread of infectious disease.

Ohio business owners have enjoyed a strong history of freedom from government overreach; perhaps that is why the healthcare and business community here in Ohio is united in its opposition to this legislation.

Parents that choose to vaccinate their children attend doctor's appointments or visit their health departments. This takes time out of their busy lives.

As stated above, it isn't difficult for a family to obtain a vaccine exemption in our state: a one-sided sheet of paper with a signature is all that's required. However, House Bill 248 would do away with with this token amount of work. Parents who either choose not to immunize or simply don't feel like filling out the form could call the school or daycare and claim a medical or nonmedical exemption with no documentation. As a result, HB 248 will only degrade the health of Ohio's communities.

The overreaching aims of House Bill 248 sweep on. By preventing school districts and health departments from having an accurate understanding of immunization rates in their jurisdictions, it hobbles responses to disease outbreaks. Whereas now, our public health leaders have the information to respond to disease outbreaks in a targeted way, alerting and protecting those individuals most at risk. This includes Ohio children with cancers and immune-compromising conditions. Without this information, our school and health department leaders will instead have to respond to disease outbreaks with expensive, intrusive shut downs like those we endured in March of 2020.

Immunization is a personal choice for patients and their parents. But, don't forget: children have rights too. This includes the right to good health. In the case of vaccination, individual choice affects the health of all Ohioans. The fact of the matter is, no one is forced to receive an immunization or is discriminated against for their decision to decline an immunization. Ohio is among the states with the easiest-to-obtain vaccine exemptions. I have never worked at a hospital that required flu vaccination that didn't also allow liberally for employees to abstain.

It is important that this committee understands that Ohioans strongly support immunization. Not content with declining vaccines for themselves and their children, Ohio's anti-vaccine activists instead have consistently tried to erode the trust of ordinary Ohioans in immunizations and in their physicians. I am appalled at the baseless, fanciful accusations submitted by those in support of HB 248 that seek to besmirch healthcare workers like myself. I should be able to provide evidence-based care to the children I serve free from overreach from these individuals and the government.

In closing, I exhort you to place the interests of all Ohioans ahead of a vocal minority. Ohio's healthcare providers are deeply concerned about this

proposed legislation. In your times of need, you trust us with your health and that of your family. I am asking you to trust us now. On behalf of myself, my family, and my patients, I hope you will oppose this harmful legislation. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

- Sean Gallagher, MD, FAAP