

HB 248: To Prohibit Required Vaccination Status
Opponent Testimony: Ellen Gelles, MD, FACP
Ohio House Health Committee
June 15, 2021

I appreciate the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 248. I am concerned by this legislation, as it would put Ohioans at risk for vaccine-preventable diseases. HB 248 does much more than prevent mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations, as it would actually apply to ALL vaccinations.

As an internist in practice for nearly 25 years, I have seen great success stories related to vaccines. My particular experience relates to working in hospitals where vaccines for influenza and hepatitis B are required for employees. Not only does this protect our patients from acquiring life threatening diseases from their health care providers, but the mandatory influenza vaccine reduces absenteeism significantly each Winter. Studies by CDC researchers have found that in a typical flu season, influenza imposes an estimated \$87.1 billion economic burden on the country, and health care facilities requiring flu vaccinations among their employees can reduce patients' risk of contracting influenza or influenza-like illness by 42%. We have learned more than ever this past year how important it is to have a healthcare work force ready to go to work. Having our front line workers unimmunized could compromise this significantly.

I currently work in a safety net health care system in Cleveland, where I care for many vulnerable and elderly patients. Some of them, because of their age and medical issues, do not have strong enough immune systems to get the full benefit from vaccines themselves. I fear that if workers at their medical offices, nursing homes, and hospitals are not required to get vaccinated, they may cause illness and death to my patients. I, like many Ohioans, have been quite traumatized by the death in nursing homes from communicable illnesses in 2020. I do not want to see this situation continue or occur again.

Through vaccinations we not only provide critical protection for infants, young children, and immunocompromised individuals, but we keep ourselves, our families, and our neighbors safe. We have come take the success of vaccinations for granted as we all benefit from their protection every single day. Because of vaccines, we live our daily lives largely safe from many diseases that once spread through the population unchecked. We cannot afford to risk weakening that protection with HB 248, which would be a significant setback to the health of Ohioans.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns, and once again, I urge the committee to reject HB 248 to keep Ohioans safe and avoid dangerous consequences for our state.