

Thank you to the House Health Committee for the opportunity to provide written testimony on House Bill 248 (HB248).

My name is Erin McCann and I am a pediatrician at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. I am writing to express my deep concerns about HB248. I became a pediatrician so I could protect children from harm and help them become healthy adults, and this bill threatens the well-being of the children of Ohio. HB248 is framed as a measure to protect people from unwanted vaccine passports or mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations. In reality though, this bill does not even mention the word COVID-19 or coronavirus. Its real intent is to strip away the protections that childhood vaccinations provide to our communities.

This bill would prohibit schools and daycares from requiring up to date immunizations, and it would even prohibit these facilities from requesting vaccine records. This means that if an outbreak were to occur in the community, we would have no way to track which children are most vulnerable.

HB248 also prevents hospitals from being able to mandate that their employees wear masks in specific patient care areas. This is a rule that existed at our hospital, Cincinnati Children's, long before the pandemic started. Masks are vital when I enter a patient's room who may have the flu, or pneumonia, or even tuberculosis, so I do not inadvertently carry this disease to my next patient's room. If HB248 is passed, this safety precaution that we take seriously in our hospital would be stripped away. This would allow disease to spread freely across our patients and health care providers at alarming rates. Imagine your child was admitted to the hospital because of a broken bone (which is already a stressful experience), but then having a prolonged stay because your child contracted the flu or RSV after being exposed by someone taking care of your child who was not wearing a mask while at work.

HB248 would also prohibit hospitals from mandating that their employees are fully vaccinated. This terrifies me when I think about the babies we admit all the time in their first days of life. In the NICU, many of our babies are too young or too fragile to receive their vaccines. Could you imagine if their nurse or doctor were unvaccinated against pertussis (also known as the whooping cough) and spread it to the patient they were caring for? The whooping cough can cause severe respiratory infections in young babies and can even lead to death. Sadly, this is the just the tip of the iceberg.

I moved to Cincinnati along with my husband, who is also a physician, solely for the incredible training that we would receive by joining some of the strongest residency programs in the country. Once I moved here though, I fell in love with the city, with my patients, and with the incredible health care providers that I work with on a daily basis. I feel safe working at Cincinnati Children's because I know I am doing everything I can to protect myself and my patients from spreading disease. I know the nurses and nurse practitioners, respiratory therapists, physical and occupational therapists, pharmacists and all the other health care workers want to make our patients feel better. I cannot imagine having to tell a family that while they were in the hospital, they unfortunately were exposed to a dangerous infectious disease because one of the health care staff was not wearing a mask, or because their child was exposed to a patient who was not fully vaccinated. Help us protect your children so they can grow up to be the healthiest and happiest versions they can possibly be.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opposition to this bill.

Best,

Erin McCann, MD, MPH