

The logo for the Ohio Association of Health Plans features a stylized lowercase letter 'i' on the left. The dot of the 'i' is a light blue circle, and the stem is a dark blue shape that curves to the right. To the right of the 'i' is the text 'Ohio Association of Health Plans' in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

# Ohio Association of Health Plans

June 15, 2021

Chairman Scott Lipps  
House Health Committee  
77 S. High St., 13th Floor  
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairman Lipps,

On behalf of the Ohio Association of Health Plans (OAHP), thank you for the opportunity to offer written opponent testimony on House Bill 248, which takes a dangerous and unnecessary step backwards and puts all Ohioans at risk in regard to current and future vaccine preventable diseases.

OAHP is the state's leading trade association representing the health insurance industry. Our member plans provide health benefits to more than 9 million Ohioans through employer-sponsored coverage, the individual insurance market, and public programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and the Federal Insurance Marketplace. Our members offer a broad range of health insurance products to Ohioans in the commercial marketplace and are committed partners in public programs.

HB 248 puts our current public health framework in jeopardy. This framework is partially built upon responding to vaccine preventable diseases such as measles and tuberculosis by creating herd immunity or community immunity. As you know, this is when enough people in a population are immune to an infectious disease that spread from person to person is unlikely. If population immunity is high enough, there is some protection for those cannot receive immunity, like newborns or other vulnerable populations<sup>1</sup>.

Through the COVID-19 pandemic we have seen how quickly infectious disease can spread when left unchecked. From an individual's health to the health of the economy, the pandemic affected almost every aspect of our lives. However, with multiple vaccines now widely available, further infection and spread is preventable. Just as Polio has been all but eradicated as a result of the first vaccine created in 1955.<sup>2</sup>

However, HB 248 puts this all at risk as it contemplates every vaccine, not just the COVID-19 vaccine. This means that not only are the chances of reaching herd immunity for COVID-19 extremely low, but we will also likely see an influx of other vaccine preventable diseases. Further, the legislation would prohibit requiring any and all childhood vaccines, which will have catastrophic long-term effects on children and adolescents. **In the United States alone, approximately 42,00 of the 4.1 million children born each year will die early deaths as a result of vaccine preventable diseases<sup>3</sup>.** This number is likely to only increase if this legislation passes.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/terms/glossary.html#commimmunity>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.who.int/biologicals/areas/vaccines/polio/production/en/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ahip.org/vaccines-save-lives/>

Refusal of vaccines also has a financial cost. If more individuals are refusing vaccines, then more people will likely get sick from vaccine preventable diseases. This means more people will be needing higher acuity, costly care. **Specifically, vaccinations to children born over a 20-year period will save nearly \$295 billion in direct costs through avoided hospitalizations and other medical care<sup>4</sup>.** If these avoided costs become realized costs through vaccine refusal, the result will be increased healthcare costs for all Ohioans.

To summarize, HB 248 would put all Ohioans at risk while increasing the cost of health care for families, individuals, and businesses. The bill applies to *all* immunizations, including childhood vaccines. If passed, this legislation could reverse decades of immunity from life-threatening, but vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, mumps, hepatitis, meningitis, and tuberculosis.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 248 on behalf of the more than 9 million Ohioans to whom member plans provide health care coverage. We stand ready to work with policymakers to develop meaningful solutions that address the health of every Ohioan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K O'Rj". The letters are stylized and cursive.

Kelly O'Reilly  
President and CEO

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ahip.org/vaccines-save-lives/>