



**Opposition Testimony from the Ohio State Coroners Association on
Sub. HB 248: Vaccine Choice and Anti-Discrimination Act
House Health Committee
June 15, 2021**

Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo and distinguished members of the House Health Committee. My name is Dr. Kent Harshbarger and I am the Chief Forensic Officer for the Ohio State Coroners Association. I am also the elected coroner for Montgomery County and have actively practiced as a forensic pathologist since 2001.

Coroners have unfortunately been on the frontline of the COVID-19 pandemic public health planning. We have seen the toll COVID-19 has taken on families and the significant risk placed on first responders, law enforcement and death investigators. The toll is beyond additional investigations, but in PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and the anxiety of being exposed to another potentially lethal substance. The COVID vaccine is the only weapon which can combat the spread, lower the severity of the disease and its associated hospitalization and mortality. Hospitals are now reporting that current patients hospitalized with acute COVID have consistently been the non-vaccinated.

The choice to take the COVID vaccine is still optional, not mandatory. So why is a bill like Sub. HB 248 even necessary? Ohio already allows parents/patients to opt out of any vaccines with a medical, religious or philosophical belief. This bill seems to promote less compliance with vaccines and discourages the use of protection, such as the simple use of a face mask, in known or potential situations of exposure. This bill defies logic in its plan to prioritize the individual over proven community infection control practices to prevent outbreaks and reduce the transmission of communicable diseases. Health care facilities, schools, day care centers and mass transit authorities will lose the opportunity to protect their customers and employees.

Sub. HB 248 puts all Ohioans, particularly children, at risk. Childhood vaccines have kept children safe for many years due to the significant number of vaccinated. The prevalence of measles, diphtheria, pertussis (whooping cough), varicella (chickenpox) and tetanus are low at this time. Few alive remember the serious consequences of childhood polio, while it has been essentially eliminated from this country **because** of mandatory vaccines. However, if less children are vaccinated, outbreaks will occur and these lethal diseases will cause an increase in preventable childhood death and disability. Vaccines can prevent a lifetime of disability and trauma for families and lessen the strain on health care providers. Vaccines reduce the lost productivity to businesses from afflicted associates or their families. Vaccines minimize lost tax revenue to the state by preventing death, disability, and lost wages.

Before the modern era of routine vaccination, this country lost 6,000 children per year to measles, 1,000 children to German measles (rubeola), 9,000 children per year to whooping cough (pertussis), and many more to diphtheria, polio, tetanus, and influenza. Families lost children and the country lost potential workers, inventors, leaders, and taxpayers.

Our health system does not have unlimited resources to manage an increased caseload of these preventable diseases on top of the normal acute and chronic conditions hospitals see. **Ohio's death investigation system is funded directly by taxpayers and would experience additional unnecessary pressure on county general funds with these preventable deaths.** And our health care workers, including coroners and coroner investigators, do not deserve chronic exposure to potentially fatal diseases which are easily preventable with vaccines.

Working with the deceased, we see firsthand the value of immunization for our patients, our co-workers and visitors. We also value masking, gowning, gloving and air filtration devices as protocol to protect ourselves. Hospital workers and visitors respecting infection control procedures assure that transmission is minimized.

Like our EMS and law enforcement colleagues, coroners and our investigators are already exposed to high-risk environmental substances and situations. We learn from every death we investigate, and we see how often death is preventable. As coroners, we participate in fatality and violence review boards, seeking ways to reduce preventable deaths. Any action to reduce widespread vaccination seems to fly in the face of these legislated efforts.

Therefore, we respectfully urge you to reject Sub. HB 248 on the mere fact that it will result in needless disability and even death, particularly among our most vulnerable, our youth.

If you have questions, please contact us using the information below. Thank you.

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