



CHARITABLE HEALTHCARE NETWORK

Ohio: Stronger. Healthier. Together.

Thank you Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Homes, Ranking Member Russo and members of the committee.

As a volunteer retired physician, I am testifying in defense of the interests of all patients in Ohio who utilize free and charitable clinics. My areas of expertise are in the fields of internal medicine and anesthesia. I am board certified in both fields but I spent the last 25 years practicing anesthesiology.

Ohio has 52 free and charitable clinics. They care for the uninsured and underinsured; our most vulnerable population. I am a conservative with libertarian leanings, a Catholic and a volunteer for Open M, a faith-based free clinic in Akron. I also volunteer for Charitable Healthcare Network, the umbrella organization for Ohio's charitable clinics.

HB248 is about freedom. The freedom to receive or refuse a vaccine. I endorse this goal. However, like so many well-intended bills, I believe it will have unintended consequences and I am honored to have the opportunity to explain why.

I will explain why this bill is not needed, how it will restrict freedom for businesses, how it will endanger the health of our most vulnerable and potentially how it could result in another total shutdown of our society.

Ohio already has vaccine exemptions for medical and reasons of conscience, including religious convictions. We already have the right to refuse.

Businesses have been severely effected by COVID. Many closed and are never coming back, others are struggling to return. If a business feels that offering a fully vaccinated environment would be helpful for them to return to full capacity, shouldn't they have this freedom?

Businesses are not being asked to make medical decisions but they should have the right to offer what they consider a safe environment for their customers, clients and employees. That should be the right of every business.

HB248 is about choice. Proponents of this bill have stated, "this is about what goes into my body" and that vaccines are being "forced". Let me clear, no-one in the United States has been physically held down and injected with a foreign substance since before 1905 and there is no threat that it will happen in the future. Mandated does not equal force.

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Our military requires almost every vaccine for their recruits. It is considered a national threat to not do so. They can do this because military recruits sign their lives away for this country. And, even under these circumstances, they are not mandating COVID vaccines.

We have choices and choices have consequences; often consequences on others. One person's freedom often becomes another's lack of freedom or safety or health. In these cases, as a society, we have to look at the optimal freedom and safety for all.

While a nurse has the right to refuse a vaccine; do not patients also have the right to be taken care of by a vaccinated healthcare worker? Proponents of this bill have said, all healthcare workers can simply wear masks.

One only needs to look at the dramatic difference in COVID cases before and since vaccines have become available; in any country in the world. Keep in mind that prior to release of the vaccines, social distancing, mask mandates and business shutdowns were all in place. Masks may be better than nothing but the efficacy between the two is not even comparable.

Most importantly, this bill restricts the freedom of hospitals, long-term facilities and schools to adequately protect their patients, residents and students. An immunocompromised patient may have a choice whether to enter a store, but they have little choice when they are admitted to a hospital. They rightly hold hospitals and other similar institutions to higher standards.

If I had a child or loved one who needed hospitalization and was immunocompromised; and the hospital could not assure me that the staff caring for my loved one had been vaccinated, I would leave Ohio to get care elsewhere.

Lastly, the fewer people vaccinated, the greater the risk of a new variant which may be resistant to our vaccines. History shows us that where there are pockets of unvaccinated, there are often new outbreaks. An outbreak of a resistant strain could result in business closures, and masking and social distancing mandates, again. This would be an incredible toll on our economy, psychological and physical health.

In summary:

- 1) We already have laws that prevent physically forced vaccination
- 2) Ohio already has exemptions to the few mandates that exist.
- 3) HB248 will restrict businesses from conducting business in the way which they feel is most advantageous for their businesses to flourish.
- 4) Most importantly, HB248 will prevent hospitals from protecting their most vulnerable patients to the maximum degree possible.

This ends my testimony. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak. I would be happy to answer any questions.