

**Kathryn Poe**  
**Opposition Testimony, HB248**

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking member Russo, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Kathryn Poe (they/she). I am a bone marrow transplant survivor and advocate for immunocompromised people and I strongly oppose House Bill 248.

I have spent the last decade of my life living in and out of hospitals. In my teens, I was diagnosed with a number of autoimmune conditions and a rare genetic rheumatological blood disease called HLH/MAS. While the disease would have likely ended my life and almost did on many occasions, I was given a beautiful gift in July of 2018: a non-related donor bone marrow transplant at Nationwide Children's Hospital-- becoming the first patient with my disease at the hospital to receive a successful transplant and cure. My bone marrow transplant saved my life, but it also altered my immune system forever.

Bone marrow transplant patients are among the most vulnerable patients in an entire hospital because of our complete loss of an immune system due to chemotherapy. For 30 days, I lived in an air compressed, locked and sealed room with no outside contact other than my nurses and partner. I was not allowed to leave. I was not even allowed to touch the floor for fear of infection from bacteria or viruses. After I was discharged from the hospital, I was incredibly vulnerable with no immune system for over two years afterward. Quite simply, the common flu could have killed me. Measles or any other viral infection was a death sentence. It was an incredibly traumatizing and terrifying experience, and I was not able to be revaccinated again until my immune system recovered two years later. Instead, I was protected by the herd immunity of those around me. But I can only imagine the added terror that I would have felt, in those situations, had my health care workers, professors, and friends not been required to be vaccinated and I had no way to know who was.

I am going to be honest. When I first read this bill, I was incredibly upset. But the more I thought about how I'd write my testimony today, the more my thoughts evolved into empathy. In fact, if anyone understands the anxiety behind putting something new in your body, it's me. I empathize with the daunting task of wading through medical data and outcomes to understand them and draw conclusions. I understand how scary a new medical problem can be, because I've been there.

I also think I understand where this bill is coming from: trauma. People are scared. They've had a difficult and confusing year. And that reaction of fear is normal. But what I do know about trauma tells me that when people are traumatized, we hurt other people in the process. We grasp at straws to understand complicated topics. We stop protecting the people we're supposed to protect. We let our fear, our uncertainty, drive our outcomes.

Health care workers put themselves at risk by nature of their job because it is their duty to do no harm to the people that they serve on the front lines. And while health care workers are people

with feelings and autonomy just like me, they also have a profound ethical obligation to protect the vulnerable that, by nature of the role, asks them to take emotional and physical risks. Protecting me, the patient, is a part of their dedication to saving lives. I and so many like me have a right to safe medical care, to public spaces, to the freedom to move in the world in businesses and restaurants just like my able-bodied peers. I have a right to pursue my life as a disabled person with proper public accommodations and equitable circumstances. Without vaccine requirements, people like me will inevitably fall through the cracks.

Thank you and I urge a no vote on HB248.