

Dear Representatives Russo and Holmes;

Thank you for the opportunity to testify as an opponent of House Bill 248.

My name is Andrew Schames. I have been a primary care physician for over 25 years. In that time, I have seen numerous instances of the human cost of vaccine preventable diseases. I have, in my practice, several survivors of polio, a virus which was responsible for numerous terrifying epidemics of paralysis and death until it was eradicated by a vaccination program in the 1950's. Some of my polio survivors have disabling limb weakness to this day. Some have spent their lives in wheelchairs.

I have a young man in my practice who was infected with the mumps virus and is now infertile. Imagine finding out at age 22 that you will never be able to have children.

I have seen several young and middle-aged women die of cervical cancer. We know that this cancer is caused by the human papilloma virus, for which we now have a vaccine. I would be quite happy never to have to tell another family that their mom is going to die because her body is riddled with metastatic cancer that could easily have been prevented.

I have seen numerous elderly patients hospitalized, and too many die, from influenza, which is one of the top ten causes of death in persons over age 65. Many of these were patients who led active lives – who worked, exercised, gardened, fixed up their homes and took care of their grandchildren.

Now, after having tended the ill and dying during the COVID19 epidemic, I have the privilege of operating the Post-Acute COVID19 clinic at the Ohio State University. There, I take care of patients who suffer from disabling fatigue, cognitive impairment, trouble breathing, fainting spells, and other symptoms that persist for months after COVID19 infection in as many as 10% of patients.

In my 25 years of administering vaccinations as a primary care physician – out of the tens of thousands of patients I have vaccinated – I have never seen a vaccine cause anything worse than a sore arm and a mild fever that goes away with Tylenol.

Viruses can't be treated with antibiotics. With a few exceptions, they can't be treated at all. They can only be prevented. Vaccination is an absolutely indispensable tool in the fight against deadly viral diseases.

The Internet is full of vaccine misinformation that is pushed out aggressively on social media. I can't blame patients for feeling confused. But leaders – not just health professionals, but teachers, business owners and elected officials – need to stand up for public health and safety. We should work to create a climate in which vaccination is routine, easily accessible, and as close as possible to universal.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote against HR 248.

Thank you.