



MERCER COUNTY  
**HEALTH DISTRICT**

Dear Committee:

Mercer County, Ohio is a rural agricultural area bordering Indiana. I was surprised when I started in public health 17 years ago to serve people from many other countries settling in the community. I was also surprised to learn of all the residents in the area that travel throughout the world for work or adventure. Mercer County has the capability of spreading diseases that were acquired internationally.

I came to public health with 22 years of experience in hospital/urgent care settings specifically working in pediatrics. Pediatrics in 1983 was not like pediatrics today. I remember holding toddlers and preschoolers while the doctors stuck a needle between the vertebrae to withdraw spinal fluid diagnosing haemophilus influenzae type b meningitis. I remember inserting needles in arms, legs, scalps, anywhere to get fluid into the extremely dehydrated infants diagnosed with rotavirus. I was fortunate enough to not know polio, but my co-worker knew polio when she was a child. The sound of the whooping cough, the facial distress, and blue skin coloration of children and adults is unforgettable in people diagnosed with pertussis. Some diseases are infrequent now because of vaccines, and some diseases persistently pop up here and there in pockets of unvaccinated people. Mercer County's last PCR confirmed cases of pertussis were in July of 2019. An eight-year-old and eleven-month-old had the cough with cyanosis and tested positive. The child and infant were not related and lived in different parts of the county.

For those of us who have worked our entire careers caring for children and adults with disease and have actively promoted prevention of disease through vaccination and improved hygiene, this House Bill 248 is devastating. The bill devalues the effectiveness of measures parents can use to protect their child and underestimates the ability of the viruses and bacteria to cause suffering and death. The duty of public health is to prevent illness and encourage health. There are laws to keep people from throwing their feces in the streets like days of the past. There are laws to keep restaurants from serving food that is spoiled. There are laws to help decrease the spread of vaccine preventable diseases. Fighting disease is a constant battle. Mercer County had a large outbreak of pertussis in 2015 into 2016 and an outbreak of mumps in 2017.

The Mercer County Health District is opposed to House Bill 248. The bill needs to separate out pandemic response from established vaccines that prevent childhood diseases. The bill needs to get rid of the phrase "or making the verbal declaration." There is no other profession, such as bankers or lawyers, that have to function on a verbal acknowledgement. Ohio has medical and reasons of conscious exemptions. The parents with exemptions need to sign the exemption. They need to agree to following the Ohio Revised Code which provides the laws for public health to protect the community including the unvaccinated person.

Thank you, Julie

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