

HB 248: To Prohibit Required Vaccination Status
Opponent Testimony: Professor Victoria Wells Wulsin, MD, DrPH
Ohio House Health Committee
June 15, 2021

As a physician and epidemiologist, I am devastated by the short-term and long-term repercussions that HB 248 would generate. Short-term, we would be “stuck” in the COVID-19 morass that limits our productivity, mobility, and wellbeing. Long-term, we would see the re-appearance of diseases that have been minimally problematic since Ohio has required their immunizations to attend public school: pertussis (whooping cough), measles, chicken pox, hepatitis B. I could go on and on.

Please note that in situations where a vaccine is “required,” and the individual has a medical reason (e.g., allergy) to not get it, the institution grants the exemption. Furthermore, for individuals who are not health care workers, religious and philosophical reasons can exempt them from the requirement. (In my forty-plus years of practicing medicine, I have not ever known a health care worker request a religious or philosophical exemption for vaccinations.)

I appreciate the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 248. I am gravely concerned by this legislation, as it would significantly weaken the robust public health framework that protects us from the devastation of many vaccine-preventable diseases. HB 248 does much more than prevent mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations, as it would actually apply to ALL vaccinations. This bill would decimate our progress in public health in the past century and hinder our efforts to fight communicable diseases in the years to come.

Thanks to vaccines, we live in a safer, healthier place than our ancestors before us did. Vaccinations are truly one of public health’s greatest success stories. Through continued scientific breakthroughs, we continue to be spared from a multitude of setbacks and losses. HB 248 is deeply troubling, as it would give more diseases (some far deadlier and more contagious than COVID-19) the opportunity to run rampant, generate exorbitant, avoidable health care expenses, and most importantly, cost us lives.

Vaccines are a direct contributor to economic gains, too. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that for every \$1 spent on childhood vaccination programs, our country saves about \$10.90 in health care costs, and that routine vaccination of children born between 1994 and 2018 has saved our country close to \$406 billion in medical costs and \$1.88 trillion in total society costs. Studies by CDC researchers have found that in a typical flu season, influenza imposes an estimated \$87.1 billion economic burden on the country, and health care facilities requiring flu vaccinations among their employees can reduce patients’ risk of contracting influenza or influenza-like illness by 42%.

Through vaccinations we not only provide critical protection for infants, young children, and immunocompromised individuals, but we keep ourselves, our families, and our neighbors safe. We may take the success of vaccinations for granted as we all benefit from their protection every single day. Because of vaccines, we live our daily lives largely safe from many diseases that

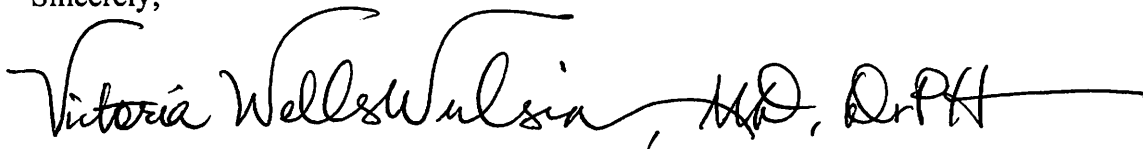
once spread through the population unchecked. We cannot afford to risk weakening that protection with HB 248. Vaccinations do not take away our freedoms; vaccinations *give* us freedom.

I have another reason for opposing HB 248. My husband (also a physician and professor) and I have 5 grandchildren living in other states, and we are hoping that sometime their parents may decide to return to Cincinnati and raise them here, just as my husband and I returned to Cincinnati after being educated and trained elsewhere. However, if HB 248 passes, our sons and daughters-in-law are adamant that they would never look for jobs in Ohio because they and their children would not feel safe here. IS THAT THE KIND OF STATE YOU WANT TO HAVE?

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns, and once again, I urge the committee to reject HB 248 to keep Ohioans safe and avoid dangerous consequences for our state.

I would be happy to meet with any of you to discuss further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Victoria Wells Wulsin, MD, DrPH". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Victoria Wells Wulsin, MD, DrPH