

Testimony of Erika Boothman, MD MPH  
Opposing House Bill 248  
June 22, 2021

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and Members of the House Health Committee, thank you for your time.

My name is Erika Boothman, MD, MPH. I am an OBGYN in Columbus, and I am testifying in opposition to HB 248.

When I was completing my Masters in Public Health at Johns Hopkins University, we had a guest speaker give a presentation about his career. The speaker was Dr. D. A. Henderson, an Ohio-born and -educated physician who directed the international eradication of smallpox. With great fervor and passion, Dr. Henderson captivated us, an audience of bright-eyed public health students, as he described his ten-year campaign to bring the smallpox vaccination to individuals at all ends of the earth. He chronicled his interaction with public health officials in various countries and described challenges of overcoming language and cultural barriers to vaccination. To combat such issues, his team worked tirelessly to dispel myths and provide reassurance that the vaccination was safe, effective, and necessary. As a result, the eradication campaign was wildly successful and the last documented smallpox case was in Somalia over 30 years ago.

Smallpox is currently the only disease to be eradicated, an accomplishment the World Health Organization describes as “among the most notable and profound public health successes in history.” (WHO) This feat was accomplished only by obtaining the trust and acceptance of billions of individuals, along with rigorous case surveillance and containment.

In my career as an OBGYN, I have cared for many patients, often during the happiest moments of their lives. Unfortunately, I’ve also cared for patients who have been affected by vaccine-preventable diseases. During medical school, I cared for a young woman who was admitted to the hospital for liver failure due to Hepatitis B. Similarly, I performed an urgent C-section on a pregnant woman who developed respiratory distress after she had contracted Influenza A, delivering an extremely premature infant who had a prolonged NICU hospital stay. A few years ago, I cared for a lovely woman in her late 20s, who died of cervical cancer less than a year after her diagnosis, orphaning a wonderful 3-year old daughter. These diseases and their devastating outcomes could have been prevented with vaccination.

Vaccines are safe and have prevented countless deaths since the first vaccine was developed in 1796 (against smallpox!). Not only do vaccines provide each individual recipient with direct protection against deadly diseases, they also protect individuals who are unable to receive a vaccination or mount an appropriate immune response to a vaccination.

HB 248 works to decay the trust that medical professionals have established with their patients regarding the safety and importance of vaccinations. This bill is irresponsible and represents many steps backward in the setting of a pandemic that has already claimed too many lives. Health care professionals and politicians need to be working together to improve the health of their communities, not erode trust in evidence-based science. I urge you to vote No on HB 248.

## References

[https://www.who.int/health-topics/smallpox#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/smallpox#tab=tab_1)

<https://www.nature.com/articles/538042a>