

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in opposition to House Bill 248. My name is Coreena Chan and I am a medical student here in Ohio.

As a current medical student, my future career as a pediatrician will be dedicated to advocating for my patients and helping them to stay as healthy as possible. I have spent over 300 hours volunteering in the pediatric, intensive care, and maternal care wards of my community hospital; I have seen enough sick children for a lifetime. I am writing this letter to advocate for today and tomorrow's children, who deserve for us to stand up for their health and to protect their futures by working towards a disease-free world.

House Bill 248, by expanding vaccine exemptions and prohibiting businesses from placing restrictions on customers, would likely result in the reversal of decades of immunity from life-threatening, but vaccine-preventable diseases. It will likely also lead to outbreaks of diseases that have been essentially eliminated in some areas of the world, such as measles. Especially in the context of childhood illnesses, like pertussis (whooping cough) and varicella (chickenpox), it is a grave concern that our communities would face increased risk of dying from diseases they could have avoided entirely. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 42,000 adults and 300 children in America die every year from a vaccine-preventable disease. House Bill 248 would only increase these numbers.

House Bill 248 also seems to disregard that there are already protections in place for individuals who cannot be vaccinated for medical, religious, and reasons of conscience. In a discussion of public health, it is not reasonable to expand vaccine exemptions to include individuals who want to refuse vaccinations based on conspiracy theories, misinformation, or contempt for science and law. Sufficient herd immunity is necessary to prevent the active spread of disease; disincentivizing vaccination will only reduce herd immunity and escalate the transmission of vaccine-preventable diseases through our communities, schools, hospitals, and businesses, especially impacting our vulnerable populations and children. This bill has been referred to as a medical freedom bill—with the passing of this bill, where is the freedom of our community children, elderly, and immunocompromised individuals to be safe outside their homes?

I hope that you understand that health risks and complications from vaccine-preventable diseases pose a significant risk to the health and freedom of all Ohioans. Ohio's healthcare providers and students are deeply concerned about this legislation. We are the people you trust with the health of your family and we are asking for you to make the right decision. On behalf of myself, my family, and my future patients, I hope you will oppose this harmful legislation. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.