

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong opposition to House Bill 248.

My name is Lisa Fioretti, and I am a combined pediatrician and internist in Cincinnati, Ohio. As a physician, I have dedicated my life to caring for my patients and striving to keep them healthy. Immunization plays a vital role in my work, and I am deeply concerned about the negative consequences of House Bill 248 on the health of my patients and our communities.

Vaccination is one of the most safe and effective public health strategies we have to prevent serious illness. Indeed, I would consider it to be one of the most monumental developments in the history of medicine, and I am thankful that there are many diseases that I only know of from my medical school textbooks. However, due to increased vaccine hesitancy, I have now treated numerous patients with preventable diseases. Several months ago, I admitted a child who ultimately needed a surgical operation to wash out the infection in her elbow, which was caused by a bacteria prevented by routine vaccination. Just this past week, I cared for a critically ill infant in the ICU who required brain surgery and now has profound hearing loss as a result of bacterial meningitis. Finally, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I have taken care of countless adults on ventilators as their bodies tried – often unsuccessfully – to fight off this vicious viral disease. These outcomes are devastating, and they are also avoidable with the right safety measures in place.

Immunization is a personal choice for patients or their parents, and no one is forced to receive an immunization or discriminated against for their decision to decline immunizations. However, that decision can have substantial public consequences in addition to personal risk. Here in Ohio, our immunization rates are already among the lowest in the country. This puts all patients and families at risk, including those who are immunocompromised or who may not have the opportunity to receive immunizations due to young age or other medical conditions. Our current Ohio law already has a lenient approach that allows for vaccine exemptions based on parental and personal choice, which likely contributes to our lower rates. House Bill 248 would dramatically expand exemptions for children entering school or a state licensed childcare center. Increased exemptions will cause our childhood immunization rates to suffer even further, leading to a loss of immunity and significantly increased risk of outbreaks caused by deadly, but preventable, diseases. Additionally, the bill places new restrictions on hospitals and businesses that would put patients, customers, and employees at risk by weakening their ability to implement important safety measures that control the spread of infectious disease. House Bill 248 destroys our current public health framework and undermines decades of research and advancements in deadly disease eradication.

I am not alone in my opposition to House Bill 248. More than 80 healthcare and business organizations across Ohio currently stand against this legislation, including Ohio State Medical Association, American College of Physicians, Ohio Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics, Ohio Pharmacists Association, Ohio Nurses Association, and many major medical centers in our region. It is also important to remember that, in addition to medical consensus, public opinion strongly supports immunization. I hope you recognize that complications from vaccine-preventable diseases pose a significant risk to the health and freedom of all Ohioans, and I ask that you uphold the protections that our communities deserve.

On behalf of myself, my family, and my patients, I urge you to vote against this dangerous legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Lisa Fioretti, MD