

HB 248: To Prohibit Required Vaccination Status
Opponent Testimony: James N. Kaya, M.D.
Ohio House Health Committee
June 15, 2021

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. I am old enough to have lived through early childhood years when diseases we do not now worry about, due to vaccination efforts, were still dreaded killers and a constant worry for all parents. I wonder how many of the creators of this bill have a similar life experience and knowledge of pre-vaccine life in the U.S. and could visualize how this bill could reverse much of the gains from having a robust national vaccine program that we have taken for granted.

As a physician with over 35 years of experience working in rural as well as urban and suburban areas; with Veterans, homeless people, homebound people, institutionalized people, and hospitalized patients. I have helped to promote vaccination to my patient's families as a way to reduce unnecessary deaths, illness, disability and heartache. 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.

Vaccinations are truly one of public health's greatest success stories. 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.

UNICEF reports an estimated 20 million children's lives worldwide were saved by measles vaccinations between 2000 and 2016. Global polio cases have rapidly declined by over 99.9% in just over 30 years due largely to vaccinations. Additionally, a study published earlier this year found that an estimated 69 million lives will be saved by vaccinations against 10 major pathogens between 2000 and 2030.

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. 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.

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.