

HB 248: To Prohibit Required Vaccination Status
Opponent Testimony: Greg Kesterman
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.

Perhaps the greatest disease-fighting tool in the public health arsenal is vaccination. Over the last century, public health has used vaccination to eradicate smallpox and polio. In addition, immunization campaigns have served to nearly eliminate potentially dangerous childhood diseases such as measles and chickenpox. Because vaccination is a requirement for entry into many schools, places of business and healthcare settings, we are able to maintain the high levels of immunity necessary to prevent the spread of these diseases.

The bill prevents requirements to use a facemask in any situation. As science has demonstrated during the last year-and-a-half, masks are effective at preventing the spread of disease, particularly disease spread via respiratory droplets. Prior to the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines, masking and social distancing were the primary tools available to prevent the spread of the virus. In addition, prohibiting requirements for facemasks in any setting is of particular concern as it relates to healthcare. I can't imagine a scenario in which surgeons are no longer required to mask and healthcare professionals no longer must mask to prevent the spread of disease.

Again in reference to vaccination, one needs to only look back over the last year to see what havoc unchecked disease can wreak on society – from the economy to mental health to human life. As we are currently witnessing, vaccination is bringing an end to the pandemic in the United States and hopefully soon, the rest of the world. Equally as important, maintenance of updated and accurate vaccination records enables public health and the healthcare system to quickly determine vaccination status in the event of an outbreak.

Sadly, Ohio already has some of the lowest rates of vaccination in the country, putting our children at unnecessary risk. In addition, Ohio currently provides several opportunities for parents to refuse vaccine for their children for a number of reasons – a more liberal position than available in many states.

As a county health commissioner, the ability to act quickly and decisively to protect public health is of paramount importance. It is hard for us in public health to imagine a world in which immunization is completely optional. The prospect is frightening.

We respectfully urge you to consider the health and safety of Ohio citizens by allowing public health to continue to implement the best practices as identified and proven scientifically. Thank you for the opportunity to add our comments to this critical legislation.