

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 Robert Kimble and I am a 2nd year medical school student at Ohio State University, a graduate of Miami University in Oxford, OH, and a lifelong resident of this state.

Throughout medical school curriculum, and even before during grade school, high school, and college-level courses, I have learned time and time again about the effect that vaccines of all types have had and continue to have on the health of our nation, our state, and our communities. Polio has been eliminated within the US, and other diseases like smallpox, measles, mumps, and rubella have been reduced to levels a fraction of what they were during the last century. This reduction in infections means that less children are dying early and painful deaths, and more are avoiding the lifelong scars that these diseases can leave on those that survive them, than at any point in human history. But with the advancement of this bill, we are posed to reverse all this progress and endanger the lives of countless children, elderly, and other medically vulnerable Ohioans.

Vaccines do not just protect those that receive them from illness, but they protect the people around their recipients as well. Those who fall outside the studied or recommended age group for a given vaccine's certified safety and efficacy cannot receive the vaccine, but are often still vulnerable to the illness being vaccinated against – they therefore rely on others around them being vaccinated in order to reduce possible sources of infection. Other individuals, like those with bodies weakened by chemotherapy or immunosuppressive medications, may not be able to take the drug because of reduced efficacy or increased chance of side effects – they too rely on those around them to get the vaccine. Finally, even people who get a vaccine rely on others to get it as well, and for more than one reason. Firstly, because the more people that deny a vaccine the more opportunities that an illness has to mutate into a new variant as it passes from host to host, potentially into a form against which that vaccine has reduced or no effect. And secondly, because everybody's body is different, a standardized vaccine will provide differing levels of protection based on an individual body's response to the protective effects of that vaccine.

It has been repeatedly stated that HB 248 is about “medical freedoms,” with an emphasis on those relating to individuals choosing whether they want to receive not just the COVID vaccine, but any vaccine in any circumstance. But I ask you this: What about the freedom of those I just described--babies and

children, our elders, the sick, and even some of those who do choose to get vaccinated--to live healthy and happy lives? In this country we have inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and those that use their rights to take advantage of and violate the rights of others are punished. But in the case of this bill, the opposite would clearly happen – people’s right to refuse any vaccine (not just COVID vaccines, which is not required by law, and the name of which never even appear by name in this bill) would place our most vulnerable Ohioans at risk of suffering loss of life and limb at rates not seen in nearly a century. Unlike many other personal decisions (medical or otherwise), getting vaccinated is not a choice that exists in a vacuum – your choice potentially affects the lives of all those around you, and we cannot in good conscience endorse a law that completely ignores this reality. Why should the rights of those that can make that choice supersede those that cannot? They should not – all Americans are equal and granting people the freedom to infringe upon the freedoms of others is absurd at best and tyrannical at worst. And that is not even taking into consideration the infringement of government into private businesses and hospitals’ rights to protect their employees, visitors, and customers.

In addition, Ohio already has laws in place that protect an individual’s right to refuse a vaccine personally (or on behalf of their children) based on religious or moral reasons. So, what is the purpose of this bill, then? It seems to be a solution in search of a problem that has already been prevented, yet here we are debating it anyway. For those of you more fiscally minded, I ask you to consider the costs that will result from enforcing this needless law, as well as dealing with the numerous challenges it is sure to face in the courts should it pass. And most importantly of all associated financial costs is the fact that the cost of providing a vaccine (\$20-40 dollars paid to the healthcare system administering a COVID vaccine, for example) to dozens of people is dwarfed by the literally dozens of thousands of dollars it takes to care for and save an individual suffering from one of these diseases’ symptoms. That alone should get a bill like this, which has the potential to both worsen health outcomes statewide while also increasing total healthcare spending, dismissed.

Not only will this bill make it harder for current and future doctors (such as myself) to protect children against vaccine-preventable diseases, but it will make it harder to care for children in general. After all, a stressed and busy parent may not take their child to a medical appointment the state has deemed “optional,” and fewer doctor appointments means less opportunities to catch

and treat other childhood illness before it is too late. Indeed, I fear that the less encouragement that vaccines receive, the more people will neglect to seek them out, but due to apathy or scheduling inconvenience rather than real concern for any possible side effects. Throughout my education, I have had the opportunity to see firsthand the great cost of human suffering that these diseases cause in countries (Nicaragua, Peru, India, Honduras) where healthcare systems are unable to provide all their patients with the vaccines that we take for granted. As such, I have seen numerous children sick and dying of diseases that we so easily avoid here, and I cannot condone any law that would willfully push us in that direction even though we do have the capacity to prevent it. I know that I, and potentially many other current and soon-to-be medical professionals, may just decide not to live in, move to, or practice in this state should a bill like this become law; we want to raise families and care for patients in places where we know the state government also cares for them, and Ohio may be starting to seem like the exact opposite.

In closing, I hope that you understand that risks and complications from vaccine-preventable diseases pose a significant risk to the freedom of all Ohioans, to a degree far greater than current long-standing vaccine mandates could ever possibly cause. Ohio's healthcare providers--including those in training, actively practicing, and retired--are deeply concerned about this legislation, and any who dissent from this opinion are in such a minority as to be considered on the fringe of the medical community if they are even still a part of it. 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, my patients, my peers, and my mentors, I hope you will oppose this harmful legislation. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.