

HB 248: To Prohibit Required Vaccination Status
Opponent Testimony: Kathleen Luhn
Ohio House Health Committee
June 22, 2021

I appreciate the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 248. I am very 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.

It is my understanding that the legislature has heard that this bill's purpose is to prevent the COVID-19 vaccine from becoming mandatory, but HB 248 applies to all immunizations, including childhood vaccines. Thanks to vaccines, we live in a safer, healthier place than even a generation before us did. Vaccinations are truly one of public health's greatest success stories.

I understand that some people may feel that while the COVID-19 vaccine is still under Emergency Use Authorization, they are not ready to personally be vaccinated. This is not the same situation, though, with other diseases and vaccinations that would be impacted by HB 248. These are not novel viruses/diseases; we have experience with them and the toll they can have on children, families and communities, **and** we have decades of experience with safe, effective vaccines to prevent them.

Many of the vaccine preventable diseases still exist in other parts of the world and people can get the disease in other countries and bring it home with them. Measles is one example: In 2014, Ohio experienced the worst outbreak of measles in the previous 20 years. Someone travelled to an area of the Philippines that was experiencing a large measles outbreak. It is so contagious that if one person has measles, up to 90% of the people close to that person who are not immune will also become infected. When introduced to their home community here in Ohio, a community with low vaccination rates, a large vaccination campaign was required to bring the outbreak under control. UNICEF reports an estimated 20 million children's lives worldwide were saved by measles vaccinations between 2000 and 2015.

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. The findings of a CDC review of published literature indicate that influenza vaccination of health care personnel can enhance patient safety.

Vaccines offer benefits at both the individual and societal level. Careful monitoring of vaccine safety, both before and after licensure of a vaccine, guides recommendations and ensures that the individual benefits of vaccines outweigh the risks. High vaccination rates are especially important for those members of a population unable to safely access the benefits of vaccination directly; for example, the very young or those who are immunocompromised. When vaccination rates in a community decline, this important firewall of high vaccination rate protection ("herd immunity") is lost, and communities are left susceptible to disease outbreaks.

Ohio already has some of the lowest vaccination rates in the country. We cannot afford to risk further weakening our protection with HB 248. Vaccinations do not take away our freedoms; vaccinations *give* us freedom. Thank you for your consideration of my concerns.