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**Opponent Testimony, Ohio House Bill 248 (HB 248)**  
**Ohio House Health Committee**  
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Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo and the members of the House Health Committee, my name is Laura Markley. I have served as the Medical Director of Consultation/ Liaison Psychiatry and as a Primary Care Pediatrician at Akron Children's Hospital since 2009. I am Board Certified in Psychiatry, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Pediatrics, and Addiction Medicine. Thank you for the opportunity to express my opposition to Ohio House Bill 248 (HB 248).

I am not here to testify in my professional capacity, but to tell you my personal story which I hope will help to illustrate the impact that vaccines have had for our society, and why we must do everything in our abilities to emphasize their importance and ensure their use.

When I was a toddler, fully vaccinated for the illnesses for which vaccines were available at the time, I developed an ear infection that evolved into a meningitis. The meningitis that I developed was caused by *Haemophilus influenzae Type B*. This type of meningitis is known to have high morbidity and mortality and presented itself as a virulent strain in the 1970s. It took the lives of many children – and continues to do so, in countries that do not have our healthcare resources. It would have taken my life, too, if it were not for the persistence of my parents in seeking medical attention for me, and the swift diagnosis and interventions employed by Akron Children's Hospital.

My parents still recall those days in the hospital, knowing my infection was serious, and hearing of other children in the hospital who were dying from the same illness. Eventually, they were reassured that I would survive, but the degree of neurological damage and other health effects I would suffer were unclear. Initially, I appeared to make a full recovery and was doing very well, until my first seizure a few months later. I was diagnosed with a seizure disorder throughout my childhood, and due to the medications that were available at the time, my behavior was affected, as was my socialization with other children. I was bullied for being different, and I struggled. Luckily, the brain is an amazing organ and was able to heal so that I was seizure-free and off medications by the age of 12. My parents moved our family to a new town, where I made friends who didn't bully me, and I was able to thrive.

In the mid-late 1980s, a vaccine was developed for this illness that had sickened and killed so many children. Before the vaccine, treatment with antibiotics had only limited success. I know my case was considered a miracle, despite the struggles I endured, and the blessings I received

remain at the forefront of my consciousness. I grew up watching my mother care for our family and for the special needs students that she not only taught, but advocated for; and my father treating and preventing disease as a veterinarian. All of these experiences combined inspired me to become a physician, and I currently work at the hospital that saved my life, trying to pay it forward to others.

I am here to ask you to protect our children, and my patients. Children and families are not in the hospital by choice – they are there because children’s lives have been endangered. As a physician who has the privilege to care for and be inspired by these patients and families, I feel an obligation, a duty to protect them. HB 248 would eliminate a hospital’s ability to require its employees to vaccinate themselves against transmittable disease, wear protective equipment to attempt to prevent the spread of communicable disease or to even test for their having communicable diseases, including tuberculosis. We need to be able to take these important steps to mitigate disease in the very places where children and their families seek care, decreasing the chances for the transmission of disease.

Further, HB 248 eliminates our ability to implement accommodations for clinical staff who are unable to receive a flu vaccine. These safeguards can include the use of masks or the reassigning of clinicians to other hospital areas where medically fragile patients are not located. The provisions of HB 248 not only put patient safety at risk, they amount to a discriminatory policy against immunocompromised children and clinical staff.

It has been queried as to whether “philosophical objections” should be allowed for vaccination in health care staff – I would offer that if one’s philosophy does not include doing everything in their ability to safeguard the patients and families that we have vowed to protect, then perhaps they are in the wrong field. The healthcare community must have the ability to protect patients consistently with the tools available to us. Additionally, parents are made aware of current immunization requirements and exemptions, and state law is very clear on how parents can obtain an exemption. Further emphasizing exemptions, as required in HB 248, seeks to diminish confidence in vaccination and will result in lower vaccination rates. This will result in preventable child deaths, and more children suffering the after-effects of illnesses that they never should have gotten.

I respectfully request that this committee not advance HB 248, and I’m glad to answer any questions you might have.