

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 Rachael Morocco and I am a general pediatrician here in Ohio. As a pediatrician, I spend a large part of my day seeing healthy kids for their routine exams. My job is to keep them healthy and a large part of keeping them healthy involves administering vaccinations against many diseases. I have been a practicing physician for 10 years and feel confident in my knowledge and experience with vaccinations. I honestly believe that administering vaccinations is one of the most important things I do everyday and has made more impact on public health than any other treatment I could provide.

In the 1940's and 50's, polio epidemics occurred across the country. 1952 was the worst year on record, with 58,000 cases, 3,200 deaths and 21,000 cases that resulted in paralysis. Parents celebrated when a vaccine was announced in 1953. Polio is now eliminated in the US because of the vaccine.

In the early 1900's diphtheria was a dreaded childhood illness that caused significant illness and death. In the 1920s, there were an estimated 100,000-200,000 cases of diphtheria per year in the United States, with 13,000-15,000 deaths. Currently, due to the vaccine, there have been 5 cases in the US in the last decade.

The point is, vaccines keep us healthier and free from disease. They have changed the course of medicine in a way that few other advances have. I know that getting a vaccination is a personal choice, but it is a decision that impacts the health of those around you. I educate my patients and their families on the vaccine development process, research, side effects and efficacy so they are making informed decisions about receiving immunizations. Ohioans currently do have the right to refuse vaccination and that decision is respected without discrimination.

I believe that this bill would be harmful to the health of Ohio. This bill would expand vaccine exemptions for children entering school or childcare and makes those environments less safe, especially for children with compromised immune systems and those unable to receive vaccines. It also places restrictions on hospitals and businesses that can place customers, patients, and employees at risk for disease. It is opposed by healthcare organizations and the business community.

Over the last several years, there has been an increase in vaccine hesitancy in my clinic. I believe a large part of this hesitancy is due to false information that is projected on social media and the internet. This bill has given a voice to some of those false claims and puts our state at risk. Decreasing vaccination rates will increase disease in all age ranges. It is important that we encourage people to believe science and evidence-based research over false articles on social media. We need to encourage trust in the years of research and data collection that goes into developing these safe vaccines.

In closing, I hope that I have made the point that immunizations are an essential component of preventative healthcare and necessary for safe communities. We, the healthcare providers of Ohio, are concerned about this legislation and what it would mean for our public health efforts. On behalf of myself, my healthcare colleagues, and my patients, I am asking you to protect the health of our state by opposing this legislation. Thank you for your time and consideration.