

HB 248: To Prohibit Required Vaccination Status
Opponent Testimony: Kevin Wisniewski
Ohio House Health Committee
June 15, 2021

Thank you for allowing me to offer opponent testimony to House Bill 248. This legislation is incredibly concerning to me because of the severe damage it would cause to the infrastructure of our public health programs that have protected all of us from the harms of many vaccine-preventable diseases. HB 248 not only prevents mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations since it applies to all vaccinations. Passage of this bill would ravage the fight against infectious diseases that began with the first smallpox vaccine in 1798.

Ultimately, strong vaccination programs led to the eradication of smallpox in 1980. Of course other diseases have also been eliminated in the USA mainly through vaccination efforts. Examples include poliomyelitis, diphtheria, rubella, and measles. In the case of measles, reintroduction by travelers from outside the country and, in recent years, anti-vaccine misinformation have led to the unfortunate, preventable reemergence of measles outbreaks in the USA. Even an underimmunized Amish population in Ohio was subjected to a measles outbreak in 2014.

This bill has far reaching consequences extending from individual to collective to economic changes that lead to larger harms to citizens of the state of Ohio. Vaccines save money, lives, and resources. Without a strong infrastructure to support vaccination, these wastes become a large burden on us and future generations.

Decimating the work done to prevent these illnesses does not stop at harming healthy people. Those who live with diseases that stop them from receiving vaccines or with weak immune systems would lose the protection that comes from high levels of community vaccination. One of my closest friend's mom has an autoimmune disorder that frequently results in her being hospitalized. She has been unable to receive many vaccines. Up to this point, she has been able to avoid those infectious illnesses that are not common to us today primarily due to the number of people vaccinated. Without this public health framework, she likely would be much sicker or worse.

Vaccination protects us, our families, our friends, our communities, children, infants, and immunocompromised people from the devastating effects many of these diseases can have. Vaccination has so greatly reduced the amount of people suffering from these many illnesses that we now take for granted the gift and blessing vaccinations have been. Despite being taken for granted, it is these very vaccines that allow us to live our daily lives mostly free from the threat of many communicable diseases. HB 248 would remove our freedom to live without this threat and carry out our daily lives as normal. Vaccinations, however, return those freedoms of life and happiness that vaccine-preventable diseases strip away.

I deeply appreciate your consideration of my concern regarding HB 248, and I strongly urge the committee to reject HB 248 to preserve the freedoms and safeties of Ohioans.