

Ohio House of Representatives Health Committee
Opponent Testimony – HB 248

Tuesday, August 24, 2021

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for providing the opportunity to offer testimony regarding House Bill 248 (HB 248), also known as the “Vaccine Choice and Anti-Discrimination Act”. My name is Dr. Chad Braun, and I am the Chief Medical Officer for Equitas Health. I write to you on behalf of Equitas Health and the communities we serve in strong opposition to HB 248.

Equitas Health is a nonprofit, community-based health care organization that serves patients throughout Ohio with a diverse set of services, including primary and specialized medical care, pharmacy, behavioral health care, dental care, HIV/STI prevention, advocacy, and case management. We are a Community Health Center and the largest Ryan White Program provider in the state. We operate four health centers and pharmacies in Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati. Our mission is to be the gateway to good health for those at risk of or affected by HIV/AIDS, for the LGBTQ+ community, and for those seeking a welcoming health care home. Recently, in an effort to contain the spread of COVID-19 and meet our obligations as steward of public health, we mandated immunization for our 500+ employees.

If passed, HB 248 will prevent both public and private employers, healthcare providers, schools, and other institutions from mandating *all* vaccinations and requiring vaccine status disclosures from their employees. This legislation has the potential to reverse decades of immunity from preventable diseases, effectively undermining our ability to protect the health of our patients, clients, staff, and community members.

Equitas Health safely and effectively administers immunizations in our clinics, pharmacies, and local communities to at-risk populations across the state of Ohio, including Ohioans challenged to regularly access primary health care and immunocompromised individuals such as people living with HIV (PLWH).¹

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised make up approximately 3% of the adult population.² These individuals are especially vulnerable to COVID-19 and are at risk of serious and prolonged illness. From individuals actively receiving cancer treatment, to organ transplant recipients, to those with an advanced or untreated HIV diagnosis – the prohibition on vaccine mandates in their work place, school, or healthcare provider’s office could be fatal.

¹ <https://clinicalinfo.hiv.gov/en/glossary/immunocompromised>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/immuno.html>

For decades, we have worked to keep our patients and clients healthy and virally suppressed³. To do so effectively, we have had to ensure that we promoted vaccination from other preventable communicable diseases so that PLWH do not experience any setbacks or complications in the treatment and management of their HIV diagnosis. HB 248 will restrict our ability to make our own determinations as a healthcare institution about the protocols to ensure the safety of our patients, clients, and staff members. We must not allow misinformation or disinformation about vaccine efficacy and the COVID-19 pandemic to interfere with our ability to protect the health and safety of our communities.

In conclusion, we must do everything we can to promote tested and proven public health measures. As a practicing provider, a champion of public health, and the Chief Medical Officer for Equitas Health, I strongly oppose HB 248 and urge you to reject this bill and any attempt to undermine our ability to meet the healthcare needs of vulnerable Ohioans.

Sincerely,

Chad Braun, MD
Chief Medical Officer
chadbraun@equitashealth.com
Equitas Health

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/art/index.html>