

right to decide whether potentially infectious individuals may enter my space—and sit across from me in a small area, face-to-face, for upwards of fifty minutes—would be eviscerated.

And with it, so would my right to protect myself and my family—which includes two children who are too young to receive the vaccine.

And so would my right (even responsibility) to protect the patients who might sit in that same space immediately after the person who had *made the choice for themselves* not to get vaccinated.

To take from me and my colleagues the ability to require, or even ask about, vaccination would drive many of us to withhold in-person services from *everyone*. This would have negative impacts on the overall provision of healthcare. It would also be a blow to the self-determination of those patients who would now have to receive care in a format other than the one they would choose for themselves, or from a provider other than the one they have come to trust with their most sensitive information and care. But to prioritize our patients' preferences by offering in-person services would force my fellow providers and I to expose ourselves, our loved ones, and our patients to greater medical risk—an inevitability, as the passage of HB 248 would increase that risk *by definition*.

HB 248 would put us on a collision course with the law of unintended consequences. How long would it be before we or our children became infected, forcing us to halt our patients' care? How long before the financial impacts of these disruptions would be felt by our families and communities, as—again—many of us provide services as small-business owners?

Just consider the medical reality now before us. Delta is far more easily spread than the original strain, is particularly dangerous to children, and now represents more than *ninety percent* of all new infections. Indeed, as the CDC and American Academy of Pediatrics reported, one week in mid-July saw new pediatric Covid cases surge to a record 39,000, while the following week brought upon us a new record of 72,000.

In light of these facts, it is evident that HB 248 could greatly undermine public health.

There are better ways to promote an individual's rights than with legislation that targets *other* individuals' rights—and adds a significant risk of further community harm in the bargain. I urge you to find them. Find them rather than cater to the vocal minority that would see the consequences of their own personal choices assigned to everyone else.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Members of the Committee,

Thank you for granting me the forum to register this testimony. My focus is on provisions of HB 248 that would prohibit healthcare providers and others from requiring or even asking about vaccinations.

As members of the House Health Committee, you are considering a bill that will not help, but rather, *prevent* many of your constituents from getting the quality and type of healthcare they would wish to choose. It is also a bill that violates the bedrock Republican principles that I have always known.

The Republican party that captured my imagination as a child of the Reagan era emphasized personal responsibility—and not making other people or entities responsible for the costs of one's own choices.

In all of our lives, there are factors that we do not choose or cannot be reasonably expected to change: our nationality, ethnicity, race, religion, sex, and so forth. If I experience mistreatment based on such factors, then I have been discriminated against. But if I make a personal, individual choice, and someone else responds based on how my specific choice could pose a specific risk to *them*, then that response is not *discrimination*; it is a *consequence*—a consequence of my decision.

I know of what I speak. As a mental health provider and licensed social worker, I belong to a profession that places the highest value on combatting discrimination, as well as on the individual's right to self-determination. And yes, individuals have the right to decide not to be vaccinated against Covid-19. But their right to self-determination does not void mine or anyone else's. What about *our* rights—as practitioners, as citizens, and in many cases, as small-business owners? “The Enact Vaccine Choice and Anti-Discrimination Act” would not prevent discrimination because no discrimination is occurring. What it *would* do is discourage the act of taking responsibility for one's own choices (something no self-respecting Republican can condone), while hacking away at the rights of the rest of us.

Apart from protections against unauthorized disclosure of medical information to *other parties*—which is already covered by HIPAA—this issue is not one of medical privacy. The issue is the right that *everyone* has: to make informed choices about what is in their best medical interests. This applies to patients and practitioners alike.

While I currently provide my services via telehealth, I have been eager to return to offering in-person appointments, as this remains the gold standard. But should HB 248 become law, my