

HB 248: To Prohibit Required Vaccination Status
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Ohio House Health Committee
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I appreciate the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on House Bill 248. I want to start by saying I understand some of the skepticism or concern around vaccines. I used to hold very strong opinions against taking vaccines. I am going to share one event that helped me change my mind. When I worked in Intensive Care the Infection Control Nurse would come to speak to us on the importance of taking influenza vaccine so we would remain healthy and be there to care for our patients, but also to make sure we did not unintentionally pass flu to our very vulnerable patients. I always rebutted her data and never took a flu shot. One year, not too long after the birth of my first son, we had a hard flu season and many employees became ill. I was one on them, I was so sick I honestly did not care if I lived or died and I could barely care for myself never mind meet my child's needs. My parents and my child's father were the only other caregivers and they were all vaccinated. It is most likely that I brought flu to my son, who was miserably ill, something I deeply regret. As a mom I always wanted care and protect my child. As a nurse I always wanted to provide the best care to my patients. I decided after that to do more reading and speak to more experts and my mind opened to the realization that vaccines provided many more benefits than problems. Years later when the Infection Control Nurse retired I applied for and took over the position. I worked diligently with the hospital Infectious Disease physician, Administration, and Human Resources to bring mandatory influenza vaccines to the hospital setting for all employees. It made a very positive impact from keeping the staff and patients flu free and lowered absenteeism and presentivism. As an Infection Preventionist I learned even more about vaccines and how they have improved our length and quality of life.

Thanks to vaccines, we live in a safer, healthier place than our ancestors before us did. Vaccinations are truly one of public health's greatest success stories. Even more than clean water, safe food, implementation of seat belts, and smoking cessation, vaccines are responsible for improving our lives. Through continued scientific breakthroughs, we continue to be spared from a multitude of setbacks and losses. HB 248 is deeply troubling, as it would give more diseases (some far deadlier and more contagious than COVID-19) the opportunity to run rampant, generate exorbitant, avoidable health care expenses, and most importantly, cost us lives. We know when we do not vaccinate the diseases return. I had to explain to my son how I endangered his young life by refusing a simple flu vaccine, do you want to have to explain to your grandchildren why they contracted polio or measles?

UNICEF reports an estimated 20 million children's lives worldwide were saved by measles vaccinations between 2000 and 2016. Global polio cases have rapidly declined by over 99.9% in just over 30 years due largely to vaccinations. Additionally, a study published earlier this year found that an estimated 69 million lives will be saved by vaccinations against 10 major pathogens between 2000 and 2030.

Vaccines are a direct contributor to economic gains, too. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that for every \$1 spent on childhood vaccination programs, our country saves about \$10.90 in health care costs, and that routine vaccination of children born between 1994 and 2018 has saved our country close to \$406 billion in medical costs and \$1.88 trillion in total society costs. Studies by CDC researchers have found that in a typical flu season, influenza imposes an estimated \$87.1

billion economic burden on the country, and health care facilities requiring flu vaccinations among their employees can reduce patients' risk of contracting influenza or influenza-like illness by 42%.

Through vaccinations we not only provide critical protection for infants, young children, and immunocompromised individuals, but we keep ourselves, our families, and our neighbors safe. We have come to take the success of vaccinations for granted as we all benefit from their protection every single day. Because of vaccines, we live our daily lives largely safe from many diseases that once spread through the population unchecked. We cannot afford to risk weakening that protection with HB 248. Vaccinations do not take away our freedoms; vaccinations *give* us freedom.

I am gravely concerned by this legislation, as it would significantly weaken the robust public health framework that protects us from the devastation of many vaccine-preventable diseases. HB 248 does much more than prevent mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations, as it would actually apply to ALL vaccinations. This bill would decimate our progress in public health in the past century and hinder our efforts to fight communicable diseases in the years to come.

Thank you for your consideration of my concerns, and once again, I urge the committee to reject HB 248 in its entirety to keep Ohioans safe and avoid dangerous consequences for our state.