

August 17, 2021

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and Honorable Members of the House Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony regarding House Bill 248.

My name is Kathy Kerr and I am a stay-at-home mother of nine. I hold a Bachelor's of Science degree in Mathematics, with a minor in Secondary Education. This is my 24th year of educating my children at home.

I am concerned at what I see happening in my America and my Ohio. I am a Patriot. I love my country and I love my state. I feel as though America is on a very slippery slope headed in a direction that none of us really want to go, trading capitalism for communism. How did we get here? We got here by not being vigilant and by not being involved. I personally have been busy, raising and educating my children. I vote, but clearly that is not good enough. For my lack of vigilance, I am truly sorry. No longer will I sit back and take for granted those liberties that so many Americans fought to secure and protect. No longer will I passively live my life, while other's fight for my rights.

I have several of points that I would like to address in my testimony.

1. Let's step back in time, imagine you are living once again in February 2019, long before we knew Covid-19 existed. Pretend you are in your senior year at a prestigious Ohio university. You are an honor student, have worked really hard and paid a great deal of money for your education thus far. One day, you receive a notice that next week the college physician will be in the student lounge handing out special medication to every student, faculty member, and support staff. Every person is required to partake of the medication, regardless of any personal risk. Those who refuse will be banned from campus. Staff will lose their jobs. Students will not be refunded tuition and will be unable to complete their education. You were born with a medical condition that precludes you from taking the medication. Your doctor warns you that taking the medication could end your life. What will you choose? If you don't take the medication, you will lose everything that you have worked so hard for. Your dreams will be shattered. If you do take it, there is a good chance that you will die from it. Should you play Russian roulette in hopes of following your dreams?

In February 2019, would any of you have thought that this scenario was possible, acceptable or even legal? Most Ohioans would have said that this would NEVER happen in Ohio, maybe Russia, but NOT in Ohio!

But here we are... It's August 2021. Ohioans are being bribed/coerced into taking a vaccine. Ohioans are being told that without the vaccine, they will lose their livelihoods and their education. Some face being unable to provide for their families. Some face known and unknown negative health consequences if they take the vaccine. All because someone, not their doctor, in a position of power decided to dictate the health choices of another.

2. My mother recently saw her doctor. He told her that under no circumstances should she take the Covid-19 vaccine. He is a highly respected medical professional, who knows

my mom and her medical history. He understands the risks that come with the vaccine and the risks of Covid-19. My mom volunteers at the local soup kitchen. She helps organize and distribute clothing for the needy. She's been doing these things for years to help those in need in her community. My question for you is: should she not be permitted to participate in society, to volunteer, to live her best life because she can't take the vaccine? She is at risk of losing that freedom. She needs you to step up and protect her right to live and give freely!

3. Throughout the pandemic, Ohioans were told to shutdown businesses and schools, social distance, and mask up - "flatten the curve" - so that patients would not overwhelm the hospitals. We "flattened the curve" and hospitals were not overwhelmed. Throughout all of this Ohioans suffered immensely, children's educations suffered and many small businesses closed permanently. In fact, my daughter's employer permanently closed his business due to the financial costs of the shutdown. Interestingly enough, my daughter was unemployed for several months prior to the closure, because her boss would not accept her mask exemption, written by her doctor. He insisted that her exemption had to come from the Dept of Health. By the way, the Dept. of Health will NOT write a mask exemption because "your health decisions are between you and your doctor and I am not a doctor." If the Dept of Health admits, "your health decisions are between you and your doctor", then why are we allowing businesses, schools, or anyone to mandate a vaccine?

4. Many Ohio businesses, including hospitals, are now requiring that all employees be fully vaccinated to retain employment. According to the media, there is currently a surge of the Delta variant in Ohio. If we allow hospitals to mandate the vaccine for their employees, and medical professionals decide to choose their personal health over their jobs, we risk a catastrophic shortage of qualified medical personnel in our hospitals to care for those patients. Doctors and nurses were good enough to risk their own lives to work without proper PPE and having to reuse their PPE last year when Covid-19 was running rampant within our state. These same doctors and nurses make critical recommendations about their patient's healthcare everyday. In fact, they are some of the most trusted professionals in our society. If medical personnel are good enough to help you decide what is best for your health, why then should they not be permitted to decide what is also best for their own health?

5. Many opponents to this bill will state that there are exemptions available to Ohioans in the workplace and HB248 is simply not needed. They are wrong in saying that HB248 is not needed. HB248 is absolutely and urgently needed, today! Yes, some employers do offer medical or religious exemptions, but those exemptions are not guaranteed and not easily acquired. There are often many hoops to obtain these exemptions, including extensive documentation from healthcare providers or religious leaders and then, interviews to question the individual seeking the exemption. The individual is often bullied and ridiculed for their exemption request. After all of this, the ultimate decision to allow the exemption is very subjective and not at all guaranteed.

I know someone that has had to navigate through the many stressful steps listed above, because he requests an exemption to the company mandated yearly flu vaccine. He has to repeat the process of requesting his exemption every year. He works in the administrative offices of a medical establishment, but does not have contact with patients. During a recent year, his employer offered the employees a free coat if the entire department received the flu vaccine. My friend was harassed daily by his co-workers, because the

rest of the department would not receive their free coat, due to this person's exemption. Ultimately, the employer decided to reward those employees in the department that received the flu vaccine with their coats, even though the entire department was not fully vaccinated.

On April 30, 2021, my friend stepped away from his desk without locking his computer. When he returned, a photo of a vaccine syringe was on his computer desktop screen. With many in the department having recently received their Covid vaccine, and knowing of my friend's exemption to the flu vaccine, someone in the department decided to harass my friend. Under HB248, my friend would be protected from yearly vaccine mandates of ANY kind and the harassment would hopefully come to an end, as no one would be required to receive any vaccine, and no one would need to receive "special consideration". As it is, this yearly process places an enormous amount of stress on both my friend and his family. Now, due to the Covid vaccine mandates that are occurring all over the state of Ohio, every day he goes to work expecting to be mandated to receive the vaccine, and forced to navigate the exemption process again, with no guarantee of the exemption being granted and being faced with being unable to support his family should his request be denied.

6. As far as vaccine passports, no one besides a physician should have the right to ask/know an individual's medical information. This is private health information. If the greeter at your favorite restaurant asks you about your mental health, your physical health, or your sexual health, would you divulge your health information to them in order to be seated? I should hope not. Neither should Ohioans be forced to divulge their vaccine status in order to attend a concert or sporting event, go to dinner, go to work or shop for groceries. Requiring any Ohioan to do this is reprehensible.

Due to what is currently happening in Ohio, Ohioans need you to take a stand and, not only vote YES for HB248, but also add an Emergency Clause amendment to HB248 to immediately stop the madness. Please stand with and for the citizens of Ohio, including your own families. Protect our freedoms. Protect our rights to bodily autonomy and true informed consent. Protect our right to choose what is best for our health, for our bodies and for our families. Do not misunderstand what I am saying. I am not in any way "anti-vax". I am 100% Pro-health. Vaccines are a tool in the medical toolkit, but they are not a one size fits all solution to any illness. An immune system relies on many things to be healthy and remain healthy. Are we going to mandate away alcohol, cigarettes, Pepsi, junk food and take-out to keep Ohioans "safe"? Are we going to dictate an exercise routine and a meal-plan for every Ohioan? Absolutely not! Individual Ohioans, in consultation with the medical professionals who know their personal medical history, must make their own health decisions.

Please add an Emergency Clause and vote in favor of HB248.

Thank you again for allowing me this opportunity to testify on behalf of HB248.

Sincerely,

Kathy Kerr