



House Health Committee  
Opponent Testimony – HB 248

*Franklin County Board of Commissioners*  
Kevin L. Boyce, President

Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to House Bill 248. My name is Kevin Boyce, and I serve as President of the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. I am here today on behalf of the Board and my colleagues—Commissioners John O’Grady and Erica Crawley—and the more than 1.3 million Ohioans we serve in Franklin County. It should be noted that Commissioner Crawley and I are former member of the General Assembly so we know the difficulty that you face making policy decisions that impact all Ohioans.

Many of us strive for healthy lives and longevity for ourselves and for our families, and we rely on the advice, treatment, and research of medical professionals to guide our decisions. As elected leaders, we know that individual health is inextricably linked with the health of a community, and it is incumbent upon all of us—individuals, businesses, community organizations and government—to do our part to minimize the danger we pose to the health and safety of others.

Public health systems have long guided our society in managing community health through education, resources, and research. From the plague to polio, there was a time when people viewed disease with resignation, when periodic pandemics would tear through communities and parents could expect to lose children to what are now easily preventable childhood diseases. With time and study, though, we learned more about what causes disease and how to prevent it, and over the years, the reach and effectiveness of public health departments has only grown. They have become so successful as to now allow some people to forget the terrible price we have paid for the knowledge they share.

In the case of the novel coronavirus, nearly 144,000 Franklin County residents have contracted the virus and tragically more than 1,700 of our neighbors have succumbed to it. Scientists, medical professionals, and public health experts have informed us about the high transmissibility of the virus, and as with other infectious diseases in the past, advised us in deploying the various tools at our disposal to minimize its harm to individuals and our communities. These tools range from accurate and up-to-date information, to harm reduction and prevention measures like wearing a mask, staying socially distanced, or getting the COVID-19 vaccine.

Vaccines have been proven effective at controlling and even eradicating infectious disease over the course of history, keeping schools, workplaces, and communities largely safe from harmful diseases like the measles, meningitis, and polio. Medical and individual exemptions from these vaccinations have long been in place, while broad adoption and usage has saved lives. With COVID-19, we have already seen the vaccine’s powerful ability to protect individuals from contracting or experiencing the worst of symptoms with the virus and its latest Delta variant, and it is a crucial weapon in this fight to return our communities to normal.

As leaders of government, it is our responsibility to promote the general welfare of our residents, and as employers, it is our responsibility to provide a safe work environment for our employees. We all give up a little individual liberty when we comply with rules to pull over for an ambulance even when it isn’t our family member onboard, and many of us put our briefcases through metal detectors before entering our places of employment. The new rules that HB 248 would enact are akin to saying that employers

and institutions must now rely on everyone's personal sense of responsibility, rather than enforce common sense workplace safety rules like wearing a mask if you are not vaccinated, complying with testing guidance if you are sick, or considering a range of wellness incentives to take healthy steps on the advice of doctors like getting a vaccine. As the data continues to illustrate spikes in virus variances, now more than ever do we need protocols in place that give us the best tools to fight this raging tragedy. To the extent we can save lives by encouraging our residents and employees to get vaccinated, we must.

We are deeply concerned that House Bill 248 proposes changes that will have broad reaching implications for longstanding practices around promoting vaccinations and deploying proven measures for infectious disease control. It will hamper the ability of individual employers to support the wellness of employees and customers, and it will threaten broader community efforts to protect and promote public health. This bill is dangerous. It flies in the face of common sense and science. It isn't so much about personal liberty as about failing to acknowledge consequences of individual actions even when those actions endanger us all, and we ask you to reject it as a policy for the state of Ohio. We ask instead that you preserve the authority of employers and communities to deploy the advice of health experts in promoting individual and public health.

Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today.