

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and Members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 248.

My name is Letisha and I am Nurse Practitioner with over 22 years of healthcare experience. I had started as a Nursing Assistant in 1999, graduated as a RN in 2001 and as a NP in 2009. Last July I lost my position in the substance abuse treatment clinic I was working at, over issues regarding my being an advocate for my patients who were having issues around wearing a mask due to past trauma. I allowed them to be unmasked in my private office where it was just them and I. I was being an advocate for my patients who have mental health issues from things such as rape and wearing a mask is a trigger for them. Fast forward to this year and I am now trying to finish up my Post Master's Psych-Mental Health Nurse Practitioner Certification so that I can fully open my own practice and treat substance abuse patients in the manner that they deserve to be treated, which is a huge need right now. Sadly however, I am now being forced to leave my university with just two 7 week clinical semesters remaining as I cannot receive the COVID shot due to medical reasons. Therefore, I am writing in support House Bill 248.

The Nursing Code of Ethics, specifically section 1.4, The right to self determination states: *"Patients have the moral and legal right to determine what will be done with their own person, to be given accurate, complete, and understandable information in a manner that facilitates an informed judgement; to be assisted with weighing the benefits, burdens and available options in their treatment, including the choice of no treatment, to accept, refuse or terminate treatment without deceit, undue influence, duress, coercion, or penalty."* All of these things are being done in many arenas right now.

As a nurse practitioner I cannot understand how this has been overlooked by so many. The many things I have seen occur in healthcare over the last 18 months has truly made me question how patients will ever have trust again. I have been an advocate for my patients from the moment I set foot in a hospital with a badge that read Letisha, Nurse Assistant. I have worked for 22 years, and counting, without having fallen ill other than one case of strep throat when I was a new grad RN in the ER. I had never taken the influenza vaccine until I was forced to or be terminated in 2018, to which I had a severe allergic reaction. I have always followed the basic principle of 'breaking the cycle of infection' and keeping my immune system healthy. I have NEVER gotten the flu, despite taking care of countless patients with the flu every year in the city's busiest ERs and again, without the influenza vaccine. I was also maskless 95% of the last 18 months and have had exposures to people with C-19. Again, no illness.

It is not my place, nor anyone's else's place in healthcare to persuade, force, coerce or influence a patient into a medical decision. We are to FULLY

educate a patient and allow them to make a decision that is best for them. Fully educating them does include providing them both sides of the script, whether you feel it is what should be told or not. If there is accurate data being provided by proven scientist it needs to be given to the patient. If it is not then informed consent cannot be completed. Period.

Furthermore, there is no member of legislature that should have any capability of making a medical decision for myself, my family or any of my patients. None of you, nor the Governor, knows my personal medical history. The university I attend does not know my medical history. The restaurants I eat at do not know my medical history. Nor do any of you have the right or the need to know. Therefore, none of you have the right to coerce or influence me under duress to make a decision that could alter the rest of my life or at worst case end my life. I have the right to medical autonomy. It is given to me by the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, by God and I am sworn to practice by it under the Code of Nursing Ethics. You are violating all of this by not signing this bill into law and you are clearly forcing many others to practice unethically.

I have spoken out many times. I have written many emails. I have asked for meetings. I have been ignored many times. The devastation this has brought and the distrust this has all brought to healthcare is astonishing. If you would listen to people rather than just thinking you were so right you would understand those who have not taken the shot by now have **legitimate reasons** for not wanting to take it and you have no right to force it. This is a constitutional government and We the People are the voice. We the People elected you to stand for us. It's far past time you do that rather than take recess and enjoy a break while we have cried ourselves to sleep over what we are going to do with our lives because you left us hanging.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to provide testimony on the need for and urgency of House Bill 248. This cannot wait another day.

Sincerely,

Letisha E Leach, APRN, MSN, CNP