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Representative Lipps
Ohio House of Representatives
Columbus, Ohio

To the Committee,

My name is Megan Wilt, a PhD candidate in the Department of Chemistry at Case Western Reserve University for the past four years. As a PhD candidate in STEM, I receive a stipend from the university, sign university contracts, partake in FERPA training and fulfill other obligations normally found within an employee/employer relationship. My occupation is a mix of student and employee, and I would like to share my story as a student employee during the covid-19 pandemic.

During the pandemic, the university instituted several policies to mitigate the spread of the virus. As a broad overview of the university's response, the previous academic year saw most classes being taught online. For those living on campus; social distancing, mask wearing and pod living were required. Students and graduate students were required to do weekly covid-19 testing. Failure to do so would result in the individual receiving emails and texts from the university as reminders.

In a narrower view, pertaining to my personal experience, I saw the culture of my educational program and work environment become toxic. Staff members within the chemistry department sent emails to the graduate researchers about how we, certified chemists, were not to knock on office doors, touch desks or pens, or go into certain areas of the overall chemistry office space for fear of the virus.

An anonymous covid-19 hot line was created for members of the campus community to report on others for not obeying the covid-19 related mandates and rules. The hot line was, and is, essentially a kangaroo court for people to snitch on someone they do not like. I was reported to the hot line this past winter. It was ironic because I had not been on campus for two weeks since I had been in close contact with someone infected with covid-19 and was self-quarantining at the time. Apparently, anyone could call the hot line about any hearsay violation from any moment in the past.

So, when I was notified by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards, during my quarantine about a potential breach of the rules, I felt fear. It was the fear of being

anonymously charged and having the burden to prove my innocence instead of having my accuser prove an alleged guilt. It was the fear of knowing that I could be terminated from my employment in a closed economy. It was the fear of a ruined reputation with unpaid bills in the background. Fortunately, my fears went unfulfilled and I was able to continue my research throughout the spring and summer sessions.

However, during the summer the administration of the university decided that their covid-19 response was no longer adequate. The administration started to send emails encouraging the campus community to get vaccinated and to upload proof of vaccination to the university's health site. The administration decided that encouragement was not enough, so they began to offer chances to win free prizes or taxable monetary amounts. The prizes failed to provide the vaccination rate that the university wanted (a value that always seemed to change) so they upped the prizes to free campus parking and free, or heavily discounted, semester tuition. This too failed to provide the sought-after vaccination rate.

On July 15th, an email from the president and provost of the university was received in which everyone at Case Western Reserve University had until July 23rd at 5pm to provide; proof of vaccination, partial vaccination, a desire to get vaccinated, a medical exemption or a religious exemption. Subsequent emails implied that failure to conform would result in the person being barred from campus, modified employment, or even termination of employment in some cases.

I was given six business days to determine if I wanted to take an experimental drug utilized only under Emergency Authorization or be unemployed with no PhD and a *wasted* four years. I attempted to contact my boss about my concerns regarding the vaccines. I was concerned about the reported side effects and bad reactions including; heart inflammation, blood clots, risk of sterilization, Bell's palsy, seizures and other neurological issues. Contrary to what is required by law under Emergency Authorization Usage, I received no additional information from my boss or from the dean of students regarding the vaccine. Nor did I receive an acknowledgement from my employer recognizing their liability if I were to suffer any serious side effects from the vaccine. I was only provided with links to websites where I could schedule my vaccine, upload my vaccination information or apply for an exemption. The pressure to conform was tangible and though I was able to obtain a religious exemption until May of 2022, I was, and am, angry that Case Western would impose a vaccine mandate after subjecting me to weekly covid-19 testing, degrading work emails about what I can and cannot touch, a 14-day quarantine, and a potential student conduct investigation during the past year.

This whole ordeal and process has left me to wonder when enough becomes enough. Did I automatically waive away my rights of self-autonomy or agency when I agreed to conduct my dissertation research at Case Western Reserve University? Had I given the president of the university, a man who is a complete stranger to me, the ability to determine what I inject in my body when I accepted the admission offer? If a third party could make me inject a drug into my veins, will the third party be able to determine my diet, my outfits, or my lifestyle?

One thing was certain though, from Case Western Reserve University's sudden mandate, lack of transparency and brusque attitude towards any type of vaccine related questions, I knew that my employer and educator did not care if I had an adverse reaction to the vaccine's experimental RNA technology. I could potentially have a life altering medical condition with no legal recourse for reparations. I could potentially be a 25-year-old woman who must take heart medication every day and alter her active lifestyle because her employer coerced her to inject an experimental drug into her veins.

In the documents given to new graduate students and in the contracts I have signed with the chemistry department, nowhere does it state that I give the university the right to dictate my medical care. I agreed to abide by a code of conduct such as, contributing to an inclusive and tolerate environment, and to conduct certain responsibilities as a teaching assistant or as a researcher. I did not agree to share my examination room at the doctor's office; whether the office be that of my primary care physician, my gynecologist, or my dentist, with the male and female strangers that make up the university's administration.

I urge the legislatures to support House Bill 248. You were elected to wield political power in defense of *individual* freedom and liberty. Do not let this virus scare you into shirking your duty to the individual. Humanity has survived countless pandemics. Those who want the vaccine can get it and those who do not want the vaccine should not be coerced, bullied or forced into getting it. Oppression does not have to come from the government for a society to no longer be free. Tyranny can come from a university.

Sincerely,

Megan L. Wilt

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