



OHIO PHARMACISTS ASSOCIATION

2674 Federated Blvd., Columbus, OH 43235 • Phone: (614) 389-3236 • Fax: (614) 389-4582

Proponent testimony for HB 6
Myriam Shaw Ojeda R.Ph., PharmD.
Fellow in Policy and Innovation, Ohio Pharmacists Association

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. My name is Myriam Shaw Ojeda, Fellow in Policy and Innovation at the Ohio Pharmacists Association (OPA). Thank you for giving me the time to speak in favor of HB 6 and the abilities this bill will provide to extend patient care and increase the efficiency of healthcare access required during this global pandemic.

I want to begin by thanking the sponsors of HB 6 Representative Roemer and cosponsors, Representatives Cross, Riedel, Seitz, and Young, for their efforts in seeing this bill reintroduced during the current general assembly. As a practicing pharmacist, I am grateful for the dedication shown to ensure that my counterparts across the state have the backing of our Representatives to care for their patients efficiently.

OPA represents pharmacists in a variety of practice settings, all across the state who began the fight against the pandemic last year by reporting for work in the face of the pandemic's uncertainty to provide guidance to weary patients, triage health issues in the face of closed clinics, compound hand sanitizer amid shortages, ensure that patients received their life-saving medications on time, and whatever else possible to meet the needs of their communities. Pharmacists worked with added social distancing requirements, aggressive cleaning and mitigation procedures, a litany of regulatory changes, and significantly adjusted workflows to provide their patients' continual safety. When the federal government opened up COVID-19 testing opportunities under emergency orders, many pharmacists quickly jumped in by using their resources and pharmacy facilities to create an entirely new service line for their patients – even in the face of ambiguity in reimbursement and insurance coverage for the services. Lastly, in the past three months, pharmacists in all healthcare settings stepped up to the task of vaccinating Ohioans – a very familiar service offered by pharmacists, but with the added complications of novel vaccines, and entirely new storage, handling, and counseling needs. Our state and our nation have turned to pharmacists as the accessible, trusted, medication experts to using their extensive training to mark the beginning of the end of this unprecedented pandemic.

HB 6 allows pharmacists and pharmacy interns to administer vaccinations under a physician protocol to patients from the age of 7 to 13 to receive immunizations for COVID-19, influenza, and any other disease states with a valid prescription. Individuals over the age of 13 will be able to receive vaccinations for any disease state, including COVID-19 and influenza. This provision is a modification from the current statute

that permits pharmacist and pharmacy intern to vaccinate for disease states limited to those that have been recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). While ACIP recommendations are based on standard of care vaccination schedules, there is a lot of regulatory time spent getting through the process required for ACIP recommendations. Considering the experiences from the pandemic, this bill ensures that pharmacists do not have to wait for regulatory procedural lag to administer vaccinations that have met the rigorous standards of the Food and Drug Administration.

Pharmacists currently are required to undergo 6 to 8 years of training to get their Doctor of Pharmacy degrees to practice. Within that curriculum, pharmacists receive more pharmacological training than any other health care professional, making them the most equipped health care professionals on any issue relating to medication therapy. Before getting their license to practice, pharmacists must take the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination (NAPLEX) and Ohio's Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Examination (MPJE). Additionally, pharmacists and pharmacy interns are required to complete a board-approved course in immunization. These courses have a hands-on portion to ensure proper vaccination technique. The training pharmacists receive is thorough and more than sufficient for the safe vaccination of patients, which is why every state in the country allows pharmacists to vaccinate patients – and over time, more and more states are reducing the red tape and barriers that have stood in the way of more seamless deployment of drug administration services and beyond. This bill continues to require the provisions necessary for a safe vaccination procedure, including training of pharmacists and pharmacy interns, protocol requirements with physicians, monitoring guidelines after vaccination of patients, and notification requirements to the patient's primary care provider.

Pharmacists have long been looked upon to provide immunizations. The current pandemic has highlighted two factors critical to the dissemination of the vaccine. First, pharmacists continue to be the most accessible healthcare providers to our patients. Second, patients trust the advice given to them by their local pharmacists.

In addition to my work with the Ohio Pharmacists Association, I also spend a portion of my time in practice at an independent pharmacy here in central Ohio. I have had many fruitful conversations with my patients who have asked valid and thoughtful questions about the vaccine. HB 6 is going to allow me to continue to help my patients access the healthcare they deserve.

In the case of the fight against COVID-19, there may be a booster shot recommended this year. There also may be cause for future vaccines that target the COVID-19 virus and potential variants. This bill allows for immediate access to the pharmacist-administered vaccination. Thinking about the possible lives this bill can potentially save, I want to commend the sponsors of this bill for proactively planning for the future and thus securing the welfare of all Ohioans. To bypass any delay in getting speedy care to fellow Ohioans, the Ohio Pharmacists Association wholeheartedly backs HB 6 and the provisions it creates to allow pharmacists to vaccinate as stated in the bill.

In addition to vaccination provisions, this bill provides a state-level confirmation of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's issued guidance under the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness Act (PREP Act) to expand access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines and COVID-19

testing, allowing pharmacists to order and administer COVID-19 vaccines and tests, as they have already been doing under the emergency rules. Pharmacy interns and certified pharmacy technicians are also allowed to do the same under a licensed pharmacist's supervision.

The allowance for ordering and administering tests has been a source of quality, time-sensitive test results for Ohioans from all settings, from downtown Dayton to rural Greenfield, Ohio. I have personally visited member pharmacists in both locations and have seen how they reached out to their communities by providing timely care during uncertain times. Patients in underserved demographics have been able to access tests because emergency federal policies empowered local pharmacists to order and administer these tests. This bill recognizes the unique reach pharmacists have and creates a pathway for future testing needs.

Thank you for taking the time to advocate for our patients. Countless lives, as we speak, are being saved through COVID-19 vaccination and testing efforts. Mothers will hug children, grandparents will see their new grandchildren, friends will gather again, businesses can return to normal functionality, and our state will move forward. I submit these comments with thanks and the hope that this is another stepping stone to leading our state towards permanent healing. I am happy to offer the Ohio Pharmacists Association's backing for HB 6, and I welcome any questions.

Myriam Shaw Ojeda
Ohio Pharmacists Association
mshawojeda@ohiopharmacists.org