



**Ohio Association of Community Health Centers
Senate General Government Budget Committee
Written-Only Testimony on House Bill 218
December 7, 2021**

Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Craig and Members of the Senate General Government Budget Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written opponent testimony on House Bill 218. My name is Dana Vallangeon, MD. I am dually board certified in Family Medicine and Addiction Medicine as well as a former health center CEO and staff physician for over 17 years. In addition, I have served as a medical director at a free clinic and at a substance use disorder/mental health treatment facility, along with an ongoing role as adjunct medical school and Family Medicine residency faculty. Currently I am the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers (OACHC).

OACHC supports all of Ohio's 57 Federally Qualified Health Centers and FQHC Look-Alikes (more commonly referred to as Community Health Centers or CHCs), providing care to more than 823,000 Ohioans across 452+ sites throughout 75 of the 88 counties. Community Health Centers are non-profit health care providers with patient-majority boards that meet the specific needs of the community they serve. For more than 55 years, CHCs have provided integrated whole person care, often providing medical, dental, behavioral health, pharmacy, vision, and other needed supplemental services under one roof.

Health center patients are among the nation's most vulnerable populations – people who are isolated from traditional forms of medical care because of where they live, who they are, the language they speak, and their higher levels of complex health care needs. Ohio's Community Health Centers have been, and continue to be, at the front lines protecting and providing health care to their patients, staff, and communities. Central to this are vaccines and immunizations. **HB 218 undermines this work and stands in the way of Ohio's path to recovery.**

Community Health Centers work closely with public health agencies and private partners to improve and sustain immunization coverage and to monitor the safety of vaccines. Vaccine-preventable disease levels are at or near record lows. This is due to the ongoing improvement in the technology of vaccines but also the universal nature of the adoption of the vaccinations. One tool used to maintain low rates of vaccine preventable disease is current vaccination law. Ohio's vaccination laws include vaccination requirements for children in public and private schools and daycare settings, college/university students, and healthcare workers and patients in certain facilities.

At the same time, current Ohio law allows for personal choice and for vaccine refusal due to medical, religious or philosophical beliefs and is already more lenient than other states. As a result, Ohio has lower childhood immunization rates than national averages, resulting in poorer health status for Ohio as a whole. These exemptions are in place today, therefore HB 218 is not necessary and will only create confusion and another barrier to the tools needed to ensure the health of Ohio's citizens.

As both a practicing provider and the CMO of the Ohio Association of Community Health Centers, I strongly oppose HB 218 and respectfully ask that it be overwhelmingly rejected. Thank you in advance for your thoughtful consideration.