



**children's  
defense fund  
ohio**

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**Senate General Budget Committee  
HB 218 - Opponent Testimony  
12/6/2021**

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Good morning, Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate General Budget Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio in opposition of House Bill 218, regarding vaccinations in Ohio.

CDF-Ohio is a statewide non-profit organization which serves as an independent voice for all children. Born out of the civil rights movement, with more than four decades of advocacy in Ohio, it is the mission of the Children's Defense Fund to champion policies and programs that lift children out of poverty, protect them from abuse and neglect, and ensure their access to appropriate and targeted health care, quality education, and nutritional wellness.

While we appreciate the leadership of the Ohio House of Representatives for their attempt to create a suitable legislative solution to the ongoing deliberations concerning vaccine requirements by employers and schools in Ohio, HB 218 falls short of what our state needs as we work toward pandemic recovery. Most importantly, this bill does not address the concerns expressed by the medical, business and education communities about prior proposals of a similar nature.

HB 218 allows an entity to require the COVID-19 vaccine, but also requires the entity to honor exceptions that are so broad (medical, natural immunity, religious/philosophical) that essentially anyone can opt out with little effort.



Vaccinations work to protect individuals from diseases that in past generations killed millions of people and left millions more with life-long disabilities, such as sterility, paralysis, disfigurement, blindness, and respiratory issues.

Vaccinations are important not only for the individual health of children, but because part of living in society is caring for the welfare and well-being of others. There are many children and adults that cannot be vaccinated because of allergies to vaccine ingredients, certain health conditions, or weakened immune systems. These members of our society depend on as many people as possible getting vaccinated to keep the disease from spreading.

During the pandemic Ohio saw a dramatic decline in child immunization, first due to closure of many pediatrician offices at the beginning of the pandemic, and later because parents were hesitant to bring their children to well-child visits for fear of exposing them to COVID. It is vitally important that children be caught up on all immunizations. As Ohio struggles to recover from the COVID pandemic, every member of this committee knows the importance of children remaining in school in-person and full time. One way to ensure they cannot return to school is to allow children to lapse in their vaccinations. An outbreak of measles or mumps in a school district could mean that hundreds of students will once again be missing school, and unfortunately, for some of those students and their families the consequences will be much more severe than a week or two of missed school.

Many Ohioans are harmed by vaccine preventable disease each year and we should be looking for ways to strengthen Ohio's immunization rates and protect our children from these diseases. Current law gives parents pathways to opt out of immunizations for certain reasons, but we should respect the ability of private employers, hospitals, and school districts to make decisions for the benefit of their employees, patients, and students. Vaccines are safe and effective.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition of HB 218.  
I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.