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My name is Margaret Carney and I am a pediatrician at Cincinnati Children's Hospital. I am writing to express my deep concerns about HB218. I have devoted my career to pediatrics because I am passionate about helping guardians provide longitudinal, preventative, and evidence-based care to their children. HB218 is a bill that will compromise this care that Ohio pediatricians and parents are partnering to provide Ohio's children every day. While it is framed as a method to prevent mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations, it is, instead, a form of legislation that would remove the protection that all childhood vaccines provide the families of Ohio.

In prohibiting schools from requiring vaccines that are not FDA approved, HB218 would not only put the lives of those who choose to forgo these vaccines at risk, but, in prohibiting schools from knowing who is and who is not vaccinated, would also prevent these institutions from implementing safeguards to protect their immunocompromised children who are unable, rather than unwilling, to obtain these vaccines. Some may argue that creating such safeguards that would socially distance the otherwise healthy and unvaccinated from the immunocompromised would be discriminating against the unvaccinated. Discrimination, however, is defined as unfair treatment against individuals or groups based upon inherent characteristics. The voluntary choice to disregard evidence-based vaccinations is not an inherent characteristic; therefore, choosing to separate the vaccinated and the unvaccinated based upon available records so as to protect the welfare of immunocompromised children is not discrimination.

What is an inherent characteristic, however, is disability and disease, including immunocompromise. If HB218 were to become law, daycares, schools, and guardians would have to choose between endangering their immunocompromised children who are more likely to suffer serious health consequences, including death, from the diseases that vaccines protect against, or compromising their education in not sending them back to school. Forcing children who are unable to receive their COVID vaccines to miss school or choose another educational avenue to avoid their getting sick is discrimination.

In preventing schools, daycares, and other places of business from requiring and validating their students' and employees' vaccination status against a common but potentially life-threatening disease, HB218 places Ohio's most vulnerable populations at risk. Please help teachers, administrators, health providers, and guardians alike continue to provide the best care for Ohio's children. Allow us to pursue our passion to provide all children an equal opportunity to grow up to become the healthiest they can be. I hope you can take these thoughts into consideration. As evidenced by the rise of the omicron variant, COVID will continue to grow and evolve for as long as it has a sufficient unvaccinated population with which to change. Thank you for the opportunity to voice my opposition against HB218.