

Ohio Senate General Government Budget Committee
Equitas Health Testimony – House Bill 218

December 7, 2021

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Cirino, and Ranking Member Craig, thank you for providing the opportunity to offer testimony regarding House Bill 218 (HB 218) which would prohibit entities, including employers such as Equitas Health, from requiring vaccinations for employees.

Equitas Health is a nonprofit, community-based health care organization that serves patients throughout Ohio with a diverse set of services, including primary and specialized medical care, pharmacy, behavioral health care, dental care, HIV/STI prevention, advocacy, and case management. We are a Community Health Center and the largest Ryan White Program provider in the state. We operate four health centers and pharmacies in Columbus, Dayton, and Cincinnati. Our mission is to be the gateway to good health for those at risk of or affected by HIV/AIDS, for the LGBTQ+ community, and for those seeking a welcoming health care home.

HB 218 seeks to prohibit public schools, chartered nonpublic schools, private colleges, state institutions of higher education, and other employers from requiring that students or employees receive a vaccine if it has not been granted full approval or issued a biologics license by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA). HB 218 also broadly extends exemptions to students and employees for fully approved or licensed vaccines for any of the following reasons: medical contraindications, natural immunity, or reasons of personal conscience including religious convictions.

The bill does not permit the aforementioned exemptions to students or employees who study or work in children's hospitals or in the intensive care or critical care units of hospitals. While Equitas Health does not maintain a hospital facility or operation, we care for immunocompromised people across the state of Ohio. For years, Equitas Health safely and effectively administered immunizations in our clinics, pharmacies, and local communities to at-risk populations across the state of Ohio, including Ohioans challenged individuals such as people living with HIV (PLWH).¹

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised make up approximately 3% of the adult population.² These individuals are especially vulnerable to easily transmissible viruses and are at risk of serious and prolonged illness. From individuals actively receiving cancer treatment, to organ transplant recipients, to those with an advanced or untreated HIV diagnosis – the prohibition on vaccine mandates in their work place, school, or healthcare provider's office could be fatal.

¹ <https://clinicalinfo.hiv.gov/en/glossary/immunocompromised>

² <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/recommendations/immuno.html>

For decades, we have worked to keep our patients and clients healthy and virally suppressed³. To do so effectively, we have had to ensure that we promoted vaccination from other preventable communicable diseases so that PLWH do not experience any setbacks or complications in the treatment and management of their HIV diagnosis. HB 218 will restrict our ability to make our own determinations as a healthcare institution about the protocols to ensure the safety of our patients, clients, and staff members.

In conclusion, I urge you to consider the impact this legislation may have on employers and providers like Equitas Health and our ability to meet the healthcare needs of vulnerable Ohioans.

Sincerely,

Robert Copeland
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³ <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/art/index.html>