



Dr. Rob McGregor, MD
Chief Medical Officer, Akron Children's Hospital
Opponent Testimony, Ohio House Bill 218 (HB 218)
Ohio Senate General Government Budget Committee
December 7, 2021

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate General Government Budget Committee, my name is Dr. Rob McGregor, and I am the Chief Medical Officer at Akron Children's Hospital and have served as the hospital incident command system (HICS) co-commander for the past 20+ months. I also practice as a pediatric hospitalist when performing clinical duties. Thank you for the opportunity to express our hospital's opposition to Ohio House Bill 218 (HB 218).

Akron Children's Hospital has always been fully committed to ensuring that we, and all health care providers, are able to provide safe and effective health care services to the patients and families we are privileged to serve. This commitment extends to our widely collaborative efforts to ensure patient safety within our facilities, and through clinical interactions in communities, to include public schools, where patients and their families, including many of your constituents, are as safe as possible. The provisions outlined in HB 218, although directly exempting children's hospitals, compromises the commitment that our organization, as well as other mission-driven organizations throughout Ohio make on behalf of our patients and communities.

To date, nearly 27,000 of the approximately 778,000 U.S. deaths from COVID-19 have occurred in Ohio, and the latest surge in cases has shown us all that now is not the time to let our guard down in fighting this pandemic. With the Delta variant causing widespread infection, and a troubling uptick in pediatric cases, we must do everything we can to protect ourselves, our coworkers and the vulnerable children who have proven to be at elevated risk for this disease – including children under the age of five, currently ineligible for a vaccine.

HB 218 specifically seeks to broadly expand a series of unstandardized exemptions to vaccine mandates with a focus on the best weapon we have in the fight to end this pandemic, which is the COVID-19 vaccine. Akron Children's has, like many other organizations, modified our conditions of employment to both increase vaccination rates of employees and decrease the spread of COVID-19 among our staff and patient population -- including those who are medically vulnerable or immunocompromised. Other entities, including hospitals that continue to interact and treat COVID-19 patients outside of intensive and critical care settings, have adopted similar conditions, however the expanded exemptions outlined in HB 218, which can be utilized with minimal evidence or documentation, essentially eliminate their right as an employer to protect their own employees.

We are confident in the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine based on the FDA's rigorous standards, clinical trials and large numbers of vaccines given thus far. As health care workers, we play a vital role in promoting the health and well-being of the patients and families we serve. By getting vaccinated we not only decrease the spread of COVID-19, we can be here to care for our patients when they need us the most.

As one of the largest pediatric health care delivery systems and employers in Ohio, Akron Children's Hospital is committed to doing everything possible to work toward an end of this pandemic. After reviewing this legislation, it is clear that HB 218 is a detriment to the efforts of entities across Ohio to mitigate disease within facilities, among staff, their patrons, and most concerning to us, it puts patient and vulnerable populations at increased risk of contracting COVID-19.

Not only does HB 218 lay the foundation of compromising patient safety, it increases the risks associated with the spread of COVID-19. Additionally, further transmission increases the risk of additional perhaps more virulent variants, with no regard to the rights of employers in the same reckless manner outlined by HB 248, the "Vaccine Choice and Anti-Discrimination Act" and other legislative initiatives. Thank you for the opportunity to share Akron Children's perspective. I respectfully request that this committee not advance Ohio House Bill 218 (HB 218).