

**Proponent Testimony on Substitute House Bill 6
Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee
Lora Miller, Ohio Council of Retail Merchants**

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Good morning Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee. My name is Lora Miller. I am Director of Governmental Affairs & Public Relations for the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants. On behalf of the 1,600 pharmacies and more than 6,700 pharmacists operating and providing patient care in Ohio, the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants (OCRM) and the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) are grateful for the opportunity to support Substitute House Bill 6. We are appreciative of Rep. Roemer's sponsorship of the bill.

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated that access to convenient and quality testing and vaccines for Ohioans at their neighborhood community pharmacies is imperative. We applaud the Committee for recognizing the valuable impact in making these services permanently available to your constituents.

Pharmacy-based testing and immunizations are a well-established practice in Ohio, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. *It is important to note that Ohio pharmacies have safely provided more than 10 million vaccines to Ohioans, including children and adolescents, over the past five years.* Given the severity of COVID-19 and the strain it has put on the healthcare system, now is the time to utilize the full skillset of pharmacists to deliver patient care and support the larger healthcare team. Pharmacists have proven time and again that they have the knowledge and know-how to bring accessible and convenient healthcare into communities. Pharmacies serve most neighborhoods across the country with numerous locations and extended evening and weekend hours. They offer an unparalleled opportunity to truly improve access to care, especially for those without a primary care provider or those living in medically underserved areas.

Pharmacists are both highly educated and trained in these services, having earned a Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD) in a rigorous program that focuses greatly on patient assessments and screenings along with direct patient care. Pharmacists also are quite literally *the* medication experts of the healthcare professions. They have in-depth knowledge of vaccinations, identifying patients in need of the service, preventing medication side-effects and avoiding contraindications, as well as providing emergency care in the rare case of an adverse reaction. Pharmacists are also very experienced with communicating with patients' primary care providers, offering referrals and counseling patients on the importance of both routine and follow-up medical care.

As the legislative process on Substitute House Bill 6 continues, we urge the Committee to strongly consider fully aligning with the federal Health & Human Services guidance and advisory opinions on pharmacy vaccines, which is now standard practice in Ohio, as it supersedes state law. The HHS guidance allows pharmacists, pharmacy interns and qualified and trained pharmacy technicians to perform the full range of FDA-authorized vaccines to patients age 3 and up. We believe that without mirroring current federal pharmacy authority, issues with future patient expectations around access to these services will arise. This will be especially apparent if a COVID-19 vaccine for children under the age of 7 is approved in the future.

To ensure the health and well-being of Ohioans during this pandemic and beyond, as well move this important process forward, we strongly urge the Committee to amend the bill to mirror current federal HHS guidance and pass the bill as amended. Again, OCRM and NACDS extend our appreciation to Rep. Roemer and each of you on this Committee for recognizing the opportunity to offer patients more options for safe and professional healthcare services. I would be happy to address any questions you may have.