

September 11, 2017

Tara S. Williams, MD  
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Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital  
Fairview-Westown Physician Center  
10654 Lorain Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44111

Dear members of the Economic Development, Commerce and Labor Committee:

**Re: Opposition to House Bill 193.**

My name is Dr. Tara Williams. I am a general pediatrician who cares for urban, primarily Medicaid children on the west side of Cleveland. While I am an employee of the Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital, I am writing this letter as an individual, not as a representative of the hospital.

As an Ohio Pediatrician I am writing to urge you to vote against HB-193. My understanding of the bill is that "no employer shall discharge without just cause, refuse to hire, or otherwise discriminate against any person with respect to hire, tenure, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, or any matter directly or indirectly related to employment, on the basis that the person has not been or will not be vaccinated against influenza for any reason, including medical religious or philosophical."

While on the surface this may seem like a reasonable protection of an individual workers rights, this is a dangerous bill for Ohio's children.

Health care workers are the first line of defense against influenza outbreak in the medical setting. They also serve as role models to lay persons regarding the safety and efficacy of the influenza vaccine.

Hospitals require healthcare workers to be vaccinated against hepatitis B as a means of protecting their employees and their patients. Influenza vaccination should not be treated any differently. It is reasonable to expect employees working in a medical setting to operate in a way that protects themselves and their patients from communicable diseases. Refusing to be vaccinated against influenza places not only the employee but all his or her patients at risk!

Influenza is a serious infection that affects people of all ages. Currently, the BEST protection against influenza is the seasonal (annual) vaccine. Last year we had 140 influenza-related pediatric deaths in the USA, 5 were in Ohio children. Influenza continues to be the leading cause of vaccine preventable deaths in the USA, with ~25-38,000 deaths per year. In epidemic years, even millions of people worldwide can die from flu.

Mandating influenza vaccination for all people working in a medical setting is an important mechanism to control influenza. Being in the medical setting, we can not only bring flu into the hospital or clinic but we can also become infected in these settings and spread it to our family and community members. People come to us to seek medical care to help them get better, not to make them ill!

The influenza vaccine is a "killed" vaccine which means it cannot give a person the flu. It is a highly safe vaccine. It is an effective vaccine. Even in years where the vaccine strain may not exactly match the strains in the live virus it still provides effective protection from serious complications and death related to influenza infection.

I am a very strong supporter of the rights of the individual. However, just as it is reasonable for a company whose employees work with dangerous machinery to require them to wear safety goggles; it is very reasonable for hospitals to require their employees to get vaccinated against influenza. When it comes to preventing influenza epidemics, the rights of the patient and the general community supersedes the rights of an individual employee.

As an Ohio Pediatrician I strongly urge you to oppose House Bill 193. An influenza related death in one Ohio child is one too many.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tara S. Williams, MD, FAAP, FABM". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tara S. Williams, MD, FAAP, FABM