



THE BUCKEYE INSTITUTE

Pharmacists Can Help Expand Access to Care in Ohio

Interested Party Testimony
Ohio Senate Local Government,
Public Safety, and Veterans Affairs Committee
Senate Bill 303

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As Submitted

Thank you, Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Brenner, Ranking Member Maharath, and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding Senate Bill 303.

My name is Greg R. Lawson. I am a research fellow at **The Buckeye Institute**, an independent research and educational institution—a think tank—whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

This bill expands opportunities for pharmacists to care for those with chronic conditions. This step in the right direction accords with our recent policy memo, ***Policy Solutions for the Pandemic: Enlisting Pharmacists to Fight COVID-19***, which recommended ways for Ohio to navigate the unique challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. As we suggested, cutting Ohio’s regulatory red tape and allowing pharmacists to test and treat the flu, strep throat, and other common illnesses will relieve pressure elsewhere in the health care system by shifting the initial point of care for these treatable ailments away from the doctors and hospitals currently grappling with COVID-19. **Florida** is the most recent of **many states** to let pharmacists test and prescribe medication for illnesses like strep throat and influenza, and Ohio should join them.

The legislature should build on Senate Bill 303’s foundation with policies that will help Ohioans access the sort of drug treatment already offered in Florida and other states.

Expanding test-and-treat authority for pharmacists will prove essential should Ohio ever face another “all hands on deck” pandemic or a second wave of COVID-19 infections.



About The Buckeye Institute

Founded in 1989, The Buckeye Institute is an independent research and educational institution – a think tank – whose mission is to advance free-market public policy in the states.

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POLICY SOLUTIONS FOR THE PANDEMIC

POLICY MEMO: ENLISTING
PHARMACISTS TO FIGHT COVID-19
APRIL 1, 2020

The Buckeye Institute's Recommendation

Ohio should enlist its pharmacists to join doctors, nurses, and other health care professionals on the front lines in the battle against COVID-19. The state should permit pharmacists to test for the virus once tests become available, and encourage them to test and prescribe treatments for common illnesses like the flu and strep throat in order to relieve burdens on other health care workers dealing with surges in COVID-19 patients.

Background

Large scale COVID-19 testing remains in the early stages, but once available, adequate testing capacity will be critical for responding quickly and effectively. Successfully ending the COVID-19 crisis will require widespread testing in order to determine an accurate infection rate, track infections, improve treatment strategies, and implement more focused containment and quarantine measures. Pharmacists can aid that effort by administering the COVID-19 test and dramatically increasing the number of trained professionals and easily accessible locations for testing. **An estimated** 90 percent of Americans live within two miles of a pharmacy, making pharmacies critical access points for testing and potential treatment for COVID-19 patients especially in rural areas that likely will face general shortages of health care providers and COVID-19 treatment centers.

The **Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments of 1988** (CLIA) regulates most laboratories that test for human diseases. Some tests, like those for the flu and strep throat, have waivers from CLIA requirements so that they are more widely available at home or local pharmacies. Similar **authorization** for COVID-19 tests could allow pharmacists to alleviate strains on the overall health care system during this pandemic.

Cutting Ohio's regulatory red tape and allowing pharmacists to test and treat the flu, strep throat, and other common illnesses will relieve pressure elsewhere in the health care system by shifting the initial point of care for these common ailments away from the doctors and hospitals currently grappling with COVID-19. **Florida** is the most recent of **many states** to let pharmacists test and prescribe medication for illnesses like strep throat and influenza. Ohio should follow suit. It also should authorize pharmacists to prescribe any future COVID-19 vaccines or medications and thereby preempt anticipated surges of COVID-19 patients in hospitals and doctors' offices.

Conclusion

Pharmacies can play a vital role in Ohio's response to COVID-19. Ohio should enlist its pharmacists in this pandemic fight and authorize them to test for COVID-19. Other states already allow pharmacists to test and prescribe for common illnesses, and Ohio should too. Making full use of pharmacists now and in the future will relieve the burdens on doctors and hospitals, and increase access to health care in Ohio's rural communities.