

Proponent Testimony on House Bill 6
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Ohio Council of Retail Merchants
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On behalf of the 1600 pharmacies and more than 6700 pharmacists operating and providing patient care in Ohio, the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants (OCRM) and the National Association of Chain Drug Stores (NACDS) appreciate the opportunity to support HB 6 and thank Rep. Roemer for sponsoring it. 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; thus, 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, screenings and direct patient care. Pharmacists also are quite literally *the* medication experts of the healthcare professions and 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. Pharmacies are also very experienced with communicating with patient's primary care providers, offering referrals and counseling patients on the importance of both routine and follow-up medical care.

As the legislative process on HB 6 continues, we urge the General Assembly to strongly consider fully aligning with the federal HHS guidance and advisory opinions on pharmacy vaccines, which is now standard practice in Ohio, as it supersedes state law. The HHS Guidance allows both pharmacists 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.

That being said, 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 pass HB 6. Again, OCRM and NACDS extend our appreciation to Rep. Roemer and the 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.