

Testimony for HB 319

Proponent Testimony – Sarah Arend

June 10, 2024

Chairman Cutrona, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Health Provider Services Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony for HB 319: The Conscientious Right to Refuse Act.”

After witnessing the events of the last pandemic, it is VITALLY important to me personally as well as every other Ohioan to retain the right to decline any vaccine or drug that violates one’s conscience or religion without facing discriminatory action both now and in any future pandemics.

In the fall of 2020, I began working in administration in a small hospital and was there when vaccine mandates were being driven. As the deadline for the COVID vaccination approached, we were asked over and over, several times every week, what our intentions were for the vaccine. Considering that noncompliance with taking the COVID shot was termination, those on the receiving end could easily interpret this relentless badgering as harassment.

(“Harassment is unwelcome conduct that is based on race, color, religion, sex (including sexual orientation, gender identity, or pregnancy), national origin, older age (beginning at age 40), disability, or genetic information (including family medical history). Harassment becomes unlawful where 1) enduring the offensive conduct becomes a condition of continued employment, or 2) the conduct is severe or pervasive enough to create a work environment that a reasonable person would consider intimidating, hostile, or abusive.” – eeoc.gov/harassment)

A full 10% of hospital staff left (in a time when healthcare workers were in short supply) by the time the deadline arrived.

I requested a religious exemption. I had been granted religious exemptions for the flu shot for the past eight years and used the exact same verbiage, as my rationale had not changed. The system VP of HR personally followed up on three occasions, pressing me for more details. After the third time, I consulted an attorney to assist with verbiage and informed her that I had given her what she asked to the best of my ability and that her continuing to ask was bordering on harassment. My exemption was approved the following day.

I worked in administration and often the weekly system COVID calls could be overheard through the open office doors. The individual above is the same person who on those calls mocked Catholics and people of faith for reasons they may be hesitant, noting those reasons “wouldn’t work” since the pope was pro COVID vaccine.

Anecdotally, over the weeks and months that followed COVID shot days, my friends who willingly (or with much trepidation) took the shot to stay employed have reported that they experienced a variety of symptoms that we now are learning may be connected to the vaccine: tinnitus, thrombocytopenia, vertigo, blood clotting disorders, heavy menstrual bleeding, several miscarriages and most recently, a 36-year-old mother of 6 with no risk factors/no family history diagnosed with breast cancer. NONE of these were ever reported on the VAERS site. None of these individuals were ever informed these side effects might even be a risk.

The COVID mandates that originated during the pandemic were terrible. Healthcare is still feeling the effects, as many committed and passionate caregivers chose to walk away from the profession or were vaccine injured. When there is risk, there MUST be a right to refuse. Ohioans should have their right of conscience and religion protected. Both of these issues are addressed in the Ohio and US Constitution. Other states are protecting their residents from this type of medical overreach. Ohio MUST as well.

I urge the committee members to please vote YES on HB 319 and prioritize the rights of Ohioans over the pleas from big pharma/big medicine. Your constituents are watching.

Respectfully,
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