

From: Melanie Hunt

Date: June 8, 2024

Re: HB 319

Chairman Cutrona, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Health Provider Services Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony for HB 319; "The Conscientious Right to Refuse Act." This bill would guarantee Ohioans, 18 and older the basic human right to decline any vaccine, pharmaceutical, drug, or biologic, that they have a conscientious or religious objection to without suffering discrimination, retribution, financial penalty, loss of employment, or loss of access to public services.

During the COVID-19 crisis, our daughter was taking college courses at Otterbein University. For various reasons, she decided against the COVID-19 vaccine. She had to write an extensive explanation for her reasoning and had to endure nasal testing on a weekly basis near campus along with others who refused the vaccination. She was subjected to at least one professor's barrage of discriminatory and inflammatory comments in the classroom about students who refused to be vaccinated. It is unclear whether the professors had knowledge of the students who were and who were not vaccinated. She also worked at a local Starbucks and, because she did not get vaccinated, was required to wear a mask when other workers, who chose the vaccine, were not required to wear a mask. This mask served as a bit of a Scarlet Letter type of identifier on the job.

In August of 2021, I, along with a number of other local concerned citizens, spoke at a Delaware City Council meeting to urge the council to not allow Ohio Wesleyan University to require students take the vaccine. I witnessed one student testify that she had one class to graduate and, because she refused to take this vaccine, would be forced to forfeit years of work, along with over \$180,000 of tuition, room, and board and would not earn her degree. The Ohio Wesleyan administrators in attendance insisted on full compliance to their arbitrary mandate.

I appeal to you, members of our Health Provider Services Committee, to protect Ohioan's right to bodily autonomy and personal health choices in the workplace, in higher education, and in society. I urge this committee to please vote yes on HB 319, "The Conscientious Right to Refuse Act".