

Chairman Cutrona, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and esteemed members of the Health Provider Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to voice my support for HB 319, "The Conscientious Right to Refuse Act."

My name is Kathy Lekic. Like many Ohioans, the recent global pandemic has left me deeply concerned about our future and the potential for new health crises. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed instances where individuals felt compelled to accept medical interventions that conflicted with their personal beliefs. This bill represents a beacon of hope that such situations will not recur, ensuring that personal autonomy and conscientious choices are respected.

HB 319 is not just another piece of legislation; it is a crucial safeguard that empowers Ohioans to decline medical treatments such as vaccines, drugs, or biologics, which they conscientiously object to. The bill's robust protections against discrimination ensure that no individual suffers from job loss, financial penalties, or restricted access to public services because of their health decisions.

These protections are particularly important to me as we consider the uncertainties of future pandemics. The right to make health decisions based on one's moral or religious beliefs must be upheld, without the fear of coercion or punitive measures from employers, businesses, or government entities.

The possibility of facing another health crisis where treatments are mandated or heavily pressured remains a significant concern. HB 319 addresses these fears head-on by ensuring that our health choices, especially during critical times, are governed by personal conviction rather than external compulsion.

In aligning with both the U.S. and Ohio constitutions, which protect our freedoms of conscience and religion, this bill stands as a necessary measure to prevent medical overreach. It reassures us that our state values and respects individual rights and personal autonomy.

In closing, I urge you, the committee members, to vote yes on HB 319. By supporting this bill, you are not only safeguarding our health freedoms but also reinforcing Ohio's commitment to protecting its citizens from potential overreach in future health emergencies.

Thank you for your time and for considering my earnest concerns.

Respectfully,

Kathy Lekic