

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

My name is Joanna Overholt and I am a nurse practitioner. The reason I support House Bill 319 because I had a severe reaction to a mandatory flu shot required by Metrohealth in 2018. I am not alone, many other friends and coworkers have also experienced injury and harm by mandated vaccine injections. We should not be required to vaccinate out of fear of being terminated for A JOB, or fear discrimination. Vaccination injections should remain a personal, Conscientious choice protected from coercion and discrimination.

My previous employer allowed to us to apply for religious vaccine injection exemptions, but they terminate those who didn't get the vaccine; religious exemptions are never approved, only medical. Even a previous allergic to the flu shot was not enough for a flu exemption. When employees had an allergic reactions to the flu shot, the company wouldn't exempt them- they required employees to get allergy tested, and then required to get a different form of flu vaccine. A nurse I knew went through this and after she was allergy tested, she received the a different flu shot and had ANOTHER reaction before she was finally granted a medical exemption. This nurse told me she would have refused the flu shot if she was able, but needed her job, and unfortunately she suffered multiple times before being 'allowed to refuse'. It is unacceptable that an employer can mandated her harm and suffering with required vaccination injections, and harming her could have been prevented if she had the Conscientious Right to Refuse.

I would have refused my flu shot I had a bad reaction to if I was protected from discrimination or termination by my employer. But I couldn't refuse, and I experienced a reaction after my “required” flu shot that I received November 5, 2018. Approximately 2 weeks after my vaccine, my symptoms started and I remember it very clearly- I leaned on a doorway at work with the arm I was vaccinated in and I remember how strange it was how bad my shoulder hurt- it was a sharp, razor slicing pain in my deltoid muscle that then made my whole arm hurt over the next few hours, then I had excruciating pain in every joint in my entire body the days following. The pain was unrelieved by high dose Motrin or Tylenol and my spinal/back pain was severe, causing me to cry at work; I had numbness/tingling in my fingers & toes; my kidneys also hurt and caused me to wake from sleep; the skin around my fingernails rashed and peeled off; I had an entire finger randomly swell, become itchy, red and painful; I developed brain fog; I started getting severe, frequent migraines, one of them even caused half of my face to become numb for weeks; I had multiple miscarriages afterwards; and finally, I had changes in a recent head MRI that were not present in a previous MRI done in 2015.

To this day, I still suffer neuro immune problems that I did not have prior to 2018 from my employer required injection. My problems seem to be getting better with a lot of time; my migraines have become less severe and frequent, and I finally able to have another child in 2023 naturally. I do not believe the timing, onset and course of my problems is a coincidence, perhaps my problems would have never happened if I had a Conscientious Right to Refuse.

In addition, since the Covid-19 vaccination campaign, I have found out that many others have experienced problems similar to mine, and I now know I am not alone. Almost every person I talk to has had a reaction or problem since their injections, feel regret for getting the vaccine injection, and most say they would not have gotten vaccination injections if they weren't afraid they'd lose their job. Many people are afraid and angry, and they are watching YOU- our lawmakers- with hope that you make things right and protect them. Please do not let us down.

This is why Ohio needs HB 319- Vaccine injections can cause injury just as any other medication can. No employer should mandate, coerce or force vaccine injections (or any medication) that can possibly cause reactions, harm or suffering to their employees. No employer should be legally allowed to reprimand/terminate/discriminate an employee for refusing an injection and affect the employee's livelihood, family, and means of supporting their family for refusing an injection. Furthermore, I believe vaccination injections should be a 'hold employer harmless' situation with letting the employee decide to take any recommended medication/injection to protect themselves from a flu or cold if they wish, and a Conscientious Choice of the employee.

It would be devastating to Ohio's businesses and our health system to lose excellent employees and providers over required vaccine injections, which has already following the Covid-19 vaccination injections. Let the responsibility and choice to vaccinate remain with the employee and protect their employment while refusing future injections Conscientiously if they chose to.

I urge the committee members to please vote yes on HB 319.

Sincerely,  
Joanna Overholt, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC