



Opponent Testimony, HB 319
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President, Academy of Medicine of Cleveland & Northern Ohio
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Chair Swearingen, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani and members of the Ohio House Health Provider Services committee, thank you for this opportunity to comment on House Bill 319.

My name is Dr. Marie Schaefer, and I am a board-certified family medicine physician at a major health system in Cleveland, and I am president of the Academy of Medicine of Cleveland & Northern Ohio (AMCNO). The AMCNO represents more than 6,700 physicians and medical students in the contiguous counties of Northern Ohio. We are proud to support the practice of the highest quality of medicine and serve as stewards of Cleveland's medical community of the past, present, and future.

We wish to express our opposition to House Bill 319 and the overreaching limitations it places on employers, particularly those in the healthcare field. This legislation has the potential to severely limit the medical field's ability to protect and promote health and safety for its patients and providers. Moreover, this bill would infringe upon an employer's ability to make appropriate decisions about the safety of their workplace. Healthcare employers have a duty to prioritize the safety of their employees and the patients they serve, and this legislation would severely hinder that.

Already, Ohioans' can petition to receive religious, conscientious, or medical exemptions for vaccination from their employers. In these cases, particularly in health care settings, our medical systems respect these exemptions and work with individuals to balance the rights of the employee and the safety of other employees and patients. For instance, if an employee has a medical condition that prevents them from receiving a certain vaccine, they may instead be asked to wear personal protection equipment (PPE) when interacting with other patients to protect against the spread of contagious disease. But under House Bill 319, this type of special accommodation would be prohibited.

As physicians we are charged with protecting the health of our patients and communities. That is why we are such strong proponents for vaccines, which are the greatest public health invention of our time. They have allowed us to diminish and, in some cases, eradicate the threat of fatal infectious diseases. This is no question that vaccines have saved lives. Indeed, the World Health Organization¹ estimates that vaccines annually prevent almost 6 million deaths worldwide.

We respect that not everyone may be able to receive a vaccine, but we must have the ability to enforce policies for frontline caregivers who are unvaccinated to take special precautions to protect the lives of our patients, and the public at-large. We believe the current exemptions and flexibility are appropriate and adequate for the needs of Ohioans who cannot or do not want to receive a vaccination.

Because House Bill 319 would take away the ability of employers and health care providers to utilize critical safety measures, we ask respectfully that you do not support House Bill 319.

¹ <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/2/07-040089/en/>