

Thank you Chair Griffin and committee members for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 4471.

This bill touches on an issue that in recent weeks has become a global topic. There has been a great deal of discussion, numerous rallies, and in some countries protests that have drawn thousands of people. Whether in Michigan, elsewhere in the U.S., or other countries, the concept of vaccine mandates stirs raw emotions.

We find that some individuals are supportive of vaccine mandates and yet others are opposed.

Why is this? Is it the vaccine? Is it concern about health? Is it the idea of a mandate? Or, is it possibly a combination of these and many more possibilities? The answers to those questions lie solely with the individual.

This bill would prohibit employers from discriminating against an individual because the individual has not received or declines to receive certain vaccinations – the influenza vaccine, the Tdap vaccine, and/or the COVID-19 vaccine - and it would prohibit employer retaliation against those who choose to “opt-out”.

There are several considerations that must be evaluated when discussing this bill. The first is, the State of Michigan acknowledges that parents have a right to obtain medical or non-medical vaccine waivers for their children. This conveys that the parent – who most likely has a job and is employed - is viewed by the State as capable of making an informed decision with regard to vaccines being administered to his/her child; why should they not be allowed to make decisions about their own health care?.

At the same time the State of Michigan Constitution states: “The public health and general welfare of the people of the state are hereby declared to be matters of primary public concern. The legislature shall pass suitable laws for the protection and promotion of the public health.” This statement can be interpreted in many different ways but should not exclude the interpretation that “general welfare of the people” and “promotion of the public health” could reflect the general welfare and public health of those who choose to not obtain a vaccine.

Consideration must also be given to our civil liberties which are the “basic rights and freedoms guaranteed to individuals as protection from any arbitrary actions or other interference of the government without due process of law.”

Also to be considered is the role of government in the business decisions made by an employer. Many believe that government is too intrusive, and I would agree with that statement, but that’s not to say that government hasn’t already inserted itself in business operations. Do two wrongs make a right? Absolutely not, but bottom line, as it pertains to this bill, there is precedence for government creating laws and rules that an employer must follow. And, that is what this bill is requesting – a statute that will prevent an employer from discriminating or retaliating against employees who choose to not take a vaccine.

The situation we are seeing now is that many employees are faced with the decision to take a vaccine, continue with their paycheck in their chosen profession or to be “fired”. This is not right!

Two years ago, the thought of COVID and the subsequent actions that have occurred, were not a thought in most people's minds. Most people would not have believed that on a global basis, businesses would be shuttered, lockdowns would occur, masks would be worn, and vaccine mandates would be issued by both businesses and the government.

Although extreme, if mandates without opt-outs occur, might we see two years from now, businesses allowed to issue mandates to any female employee under the age of 60 to take birth control pills to prevent pregnancies and thereby reduce employer costs? Might we see a mandate that requires any employee who has skin irritations such as acne, psoriasis, or rosacea (rose-a-shuh) to receive treatment so as not to be considered "offensive" to other employees? Could an employer demand that a diabetic employee consume only certain food items and then prove blood sugar levels are acceptable?

You may view these as not being comparable to the vaccine mandate issue, however, the common thread here is the threat of a business inserting itself into health care decisions that should only be decided on a personal level. That personal decision is just what it states – a personal decision. One that the individual weighs out carefully. There could be medical issues, religious beliefs, philosophical beliefs, etc. that come into play when one is making a decision as to medical treatment and care.

As I mentioned initially, discussion of vaccine mandates brings out raw emotion, the supporters having the opinion that mandates without opt-outs are necessary for "the good of the whole" and the opponents having the opinion that it's an

individual's right to make decisions as to what types of chemical agents enter their body.

The United States is not a collective society. It is a land of individuals with individual freedoms. It is a land where people have individual rights. It is a land that provides opportunities for education, employment, and enjoyment. It is a land that has the best medical facilities in the world and the best educated health care professionals. It is a land where differences of opinion can be spoken freely. And, it is a land where beliefs can vary. Researchers can present opposing views. Physicians can present differing treatment options. And, individuals through educating themselves should be able to make health care decisions that are most appropriate for them.

Thank you for providing me this opportunity to present. Since time is limited, and I have several people who would like to testify, I'd like to ask the Chair if we could hold questions until after all testimony has been provided.