

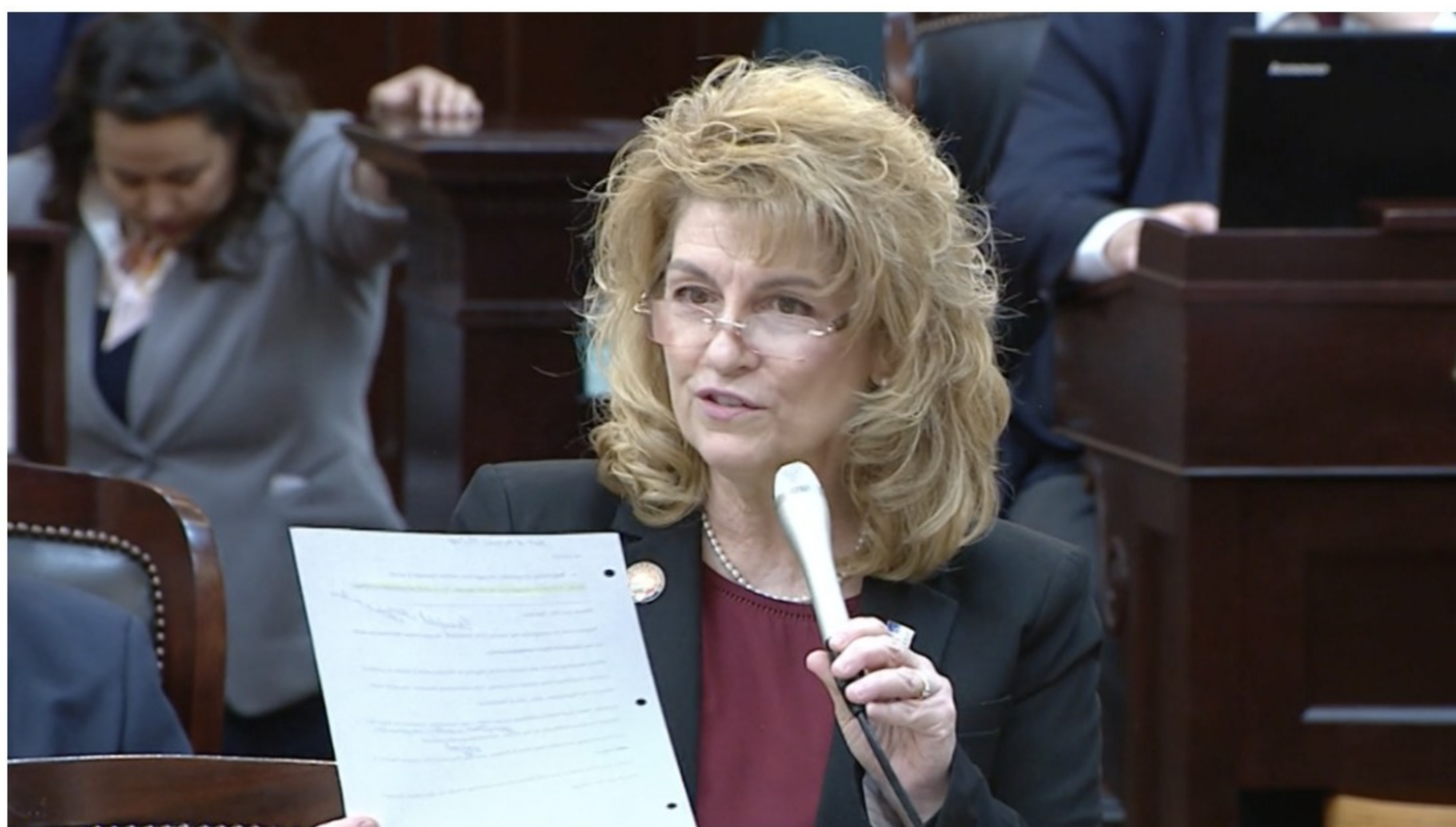
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CIVIL RIGHTS HEALTH CARE POLITICS & GOV

Ohio bill would limit the ability of employers to punish employees for not taking vaccines

BY: ZURIE POPE - MAY 1, 2024 4:50 AM



Ohio State Rep. Jennifer Gross, R-West Chester. Photo by WEWS.

A proposed Ohio House Bill would restrict the ability of an employer to punish employees for not taking vaccines, or other medical treatments. The sponsors of the bill laid out their case during the bill's first hearing earlier this month.

Ohio House Bill 319, also known as the "Conscientious Right to Refuse Act," restricts was introduced by state Reps. Jennifer Gross, R-West Chester, and Scott Wiggam, R-Wayne County, on Nov. 8 last year.

According to the bill, "A business, employer, including an administrator or supervisor, health plan issuer, health care provider, hospital, institution, nursing home, person, political subdivision, private college, public official, residential care facility, state agency, or state institution of higher education," cannot deny or terminate employment, deny service, or otherwise treat differently an individual based on an "individual's refusal of any biologic, vaccine, pharmaceutical, drug, gene editing technology, RNA-based product, or DNA-based product for reasons of conscience, including religious convictions."

If someone believes their rights have been infringed, they can "petition a court of competent jurisdiction for injunctive relief or a declaratory judgment," or, "bring a private civil action for money damages in a court of competent jurisdiction," against the entity.

Speaking at the [bill's first hearing on April 9](#), Gross said, "With the founding of this great nation, two principles at the root of our constitution include: protecting the liberties of the individual and protecting our freedom of religion."

Chastising unnamed government leaders who she said have "lost sight of what that means, and have allowed the rights of corporations and businesses to supersede those of the individual and their right of conscience and religion," Gross added, "Until now, we, as a legislative body have failed to protect citizens as their freedoms were being held in contempt at the height of the vaccine mandates."

Gross recommended her colleagues support HB 319, because it "ensures Ohio citizens have the freedom to refuse vaccines or pharmaceuticals without discriminatory action."

Wiggam also spoke on April 9, noting "that no portion of the act shall prevent the recommendation of, the education on, or access to any of the medical interventions described in this act," and that the law "does not apply to children, because K-12 law in Ohio already allows conscientious, religious and medical exemptions."

Besides Gross and Wiggam, HB 319 is supported by [Ohio Advocates for Medical Freedom \(OAMF\)](#). Founded in 2015, OAMF is the foremost anti-vaccine organization in Ohio.

HB 319 is listed as one of OAMF's "current initiatives," on their website, with the group asking their supporters to "please contact the House Health Provider Services Committee Chair, Representative Al Cutrona... and let him know why HB 319 is important to you."

On April 9, after the bill's first hearing, OAMF posted on Twitter, "[Thank you Representative Jennifer Gross, and Representative Scott Wiggam for giving amazing introductory testimony today for HB 319.](#)"

Speaking on the [Bruce Hooley Show on Nov. 10](#), OAMF President Stephanie Stock discussed HB 319's support in the Ohio House and praised House Speaker Jason Stephens, saying "he's been great for us. He's actually the most pro-medical freedom speaker we've ever had. So all of our bills have been progressing well."

Gross introduced the [Vaccine Choice and Anti-Discrimination Act](#) in 2021, for which Stock offered proponent testimony, writing "[Ohio Advocates for Medical Freedom strongly encourages you to vote in favor of Ohio House Bill 248 to codify Ohioans' right to maintain sole direction in their healthcare decisions and reaffirm Ohioans' right to healthcare privacy.](#)"

In turn, Gross endorsed Stock when she ran for the Republican State Central Committee, saying, "[Stephanie Stock has the leadership, strength, and determination needed for the state Central Committee.](#)"

Wiggam sponsored [House Joint Resolution 4](#), which stated, "No individual shall be required to wear a mask or other facial covering," in numerous locations, including court or a place of "public accommodation."

Wiggam appeared alongside Stock on [Always Right Radio with Bob Frantz in an interview from Dec. 1 last year](#). In it, Wiggam critiqued the effectiveness of masks from preventing illness, claiming “the mask movement was more of a public policy to disrupt society. We knew at the time that they didn’t really work against viruses.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics wrote, in an article published on June 30, 2022, “Face masks can be safely worn by all children 2 years of age and older, including the vast majority of children with underlying health conditions, with rare exception. In addition to protecting the child, the use of face masks significantly reduces the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and other respiratory infections within schools and other community settings.”

In 2017, OAMF distributed cards with anti-vax messages along with candy, to trick-or-treating children. During the 2018-2019 measles outbreak, Stock opposed restricting vaccine exemptions, saying “the biggest percentage complication with measles is diarrhea. I mean you’re looking at a relatively mild childhood illness that results in a rash and fever for about a week and then the child has lifelong immunity.” In 2021, OAMF was deplatformed by Facebook for sharing inaccurate information about vaccines.

An analysis of 250,000 patients, published in January of this year by researchers for the University of Pennsylvania and the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, shows “Children and adolescents who received one of the main COVID-19 vaccines were significantly protected from the illness and showed no increased signs of cardiac complications compared to young people who were not vaccinated.”

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