

Senate Committee on Commerce
February 25, 2021

Chair Olson, Vice Chair Steffen, and Members of the Committee, this written testimony **is submitted in favor of Senate Bill 213.**

I have been a registered nurse for eight years, and currently in an infection control and employee health position. For that reason, I wish to remain anonymous, to avoid backlash at my employment.

As the person administering a new vaccine to healthcare workers at my critical access hospital, the best part of my job recently has been providing the covid vaccine to those who wanted it, AND not being told to force it upon those who do not want it. Shouldn't we as nurses be given the right to choose what goes in our bodies? When we sacrifice so much to take care of others, why should we also be asked to sacrifice our freedom to decide what medications we receive?

This bill's primary intent seems to be to prevent the requirement of covid vaccine by employees. Can we all just stop for a minute and remember that these vaccines are still under emergency use authorization? That means they are still considered experimental. FDA and CDC both put verbage in place so they are not responsible for any side effects – short or long term – of this vaccine. Our country's leading scientists have not yet approved it for full use, and have protected themselves from legal ramifications if the vaccine goes wrong. Why would we allow an employer to require an experimental drug that the government won't legally back?

I know that approximately 1/3 of my nursing staff at my critical access hospital would rather quit their jobs than be forced to take a vaccine that is still experimental. These medical professionals have researched the vaccine, weighed the pros and cons, and decided for themselves that they do not want the vaccine at this time. They are responsible, intelligent adults who are the front line of this pandemic, who have treated hundreds of covid patients, and they would rather wear the three layers of PPE with every patient interaction than inject an unknown substance into their arms.

One argument against this bill is that it will take away the requirement of the influenza vaccine. I think that is a great outcome, and here is why: the flu shot, per CDC, offers only 40-60 percent efficacy against influenza. Yet it causes short-term adverse reactions in approximately one-third of those who get it. Once someone gets the flu shot, they often think that means they cannot get the flu and it makes them lower their standards of protection. I see it with my patients, and with my coworkers.

When I started as a nurse, we were given the option of getting the flu shot. If we chose not to get the flu shot, we were required to wear a mask at all times during our 12-hour shift, to prevent the spread of flu. I did not get influenza on the years I wore my mask nonstop. Then, two years later, we were required to get the flu shot but not required to wear masks. From 2014 to 2019, I got my flu shots and still got influenza. The vaccine does not protect as well as proper PPE. We would be offering better protection to our patients if we set hospital-based policies requiring masking during flu season, rather than requiring a vaccine with poor efficacy and high likelihood of short-term post vaccination symptoms. This is evidenced by the ZERO cases of influenza in our county this year.

I caught Covid-19 in November, and mine was not a mild case. I understand the severity of this virus. I have watched more than 20 patients die from it, and I continue to have long-term ramifications from it. But armed with that knowledge, I am still choosing to not vaccinate my children with this vaccine at this time. There are more ways to protect our families and our patients than injecting another vaccine, as exhibited by my family of six not catching the virus from me during quarantine nor since.

It is time for the government to stop taking away rights of the individual. "For the greater good" is not a valid reason to force someone to inject a substance into their body against their will. I ask you to please vote yes to SB 213 and prohibit an employer from taking action against employees who decide to not receive any vaccinations.