

Memo

To: Members, House Workforce, Trades, and Talent Committee
From: Adam Carlson, Vice President, Advocacy
Date: Aug. 19, 2021
Re: HB 4471
Position: Oppose

The Michigan Health & Hospital Association (MHA) opposes HB 4471, which would establish new regulations on vaccination policies for Michigan hospitals. As introduced, the legislation will prohibit employers from establishing vaccination policies to help prevent the spread of vaccine preventable diseases including COVID-19, influenza, diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough). All the targeted vaccines in this legislation are proven to be safe and effective at preventing infection and reducing the severity of illness. It is important to realize that many diseases never achieve natural “herd immunity” and vaccination is the mechanism which ends the circulation of such illnesses.

The MHA strongly encourages hospitals to ensure their healthcare personnel are appropriately immunized to protect themselves, the families they return home to, their patients and everyone who enters their facilities. As of 2016, 77% of Michigan hospitals have flu vaccination policies and 41% have pertussis vaccination policies that require employees to get vaccinated or wear a mask while inside the hospital. These policies are designed to ensure employees and patients, particularly those with weak or compromised immune systems, are protected, while allowing exemptions for medical or personal reasons.

As introduced, HB 4471 goes beyond prohibiting hospitals from establishing policies to encourage vaccination. It also removes their ability to require facemasks for those individuals. Facemasks have been used in the delivery of healthcare services, especially in the operating room, for decades. They are scientifically proven to be effective in helping prevent spread of disease and are a critical element of personal protective equipment. The MHA is extremely concerned with this language, which would allow unmasked and unvaccinated individuals to regularly come in close contact with patients, many of who are critically ill. This legislation would ignore hundreds of years of infection control research and severely hinder the ability of hospitals to protect the health and wellness of their communities.

Brian Peters, Chief Executive Officer

Michigan hospitals carefully and at length considered employee vaccination policies for those who have served on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic for well over a year. There is no group that better understands the devastation caused by COVID-19, as well as the safety and effectiveness of vaccines, than hospital and healthcare workers. The COVID-19 vaccine is not only safe but proven to reduce the risk for hospitalization and death by more than 95%. Hospitals have a moral and legal obligation to protect their patients, protect their workforce, maintain their capacity to care for individuals in their communities, and ensure a functioning healthcare system. This legislation directly impairs the ability of hospitals and health systems to perform their core functions and meet their responsibilities.

The MHA asks that members oppose HB 4471 and any questions or requests for more information be sent to acarlson@mha.org.