

HB0699

State and Local Government - Proof of Vaccination for Employees and Applicants for Employment - Prohibition (Vaccination by Choice Act)

Oral Testimony (2 minutes)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support for HB0699 with the amendments. My name is Dr. Aaron Prosser, medical resident at McMaster University in Canada. My purpose today is to share the results of a new study my colleagues and I performed which has important implications for your deliberations. It was published in February 2023 in the Journal of Evaluation in Clinical Practice.

In this study, we developed a method for estimating how much vaccine mandates are able to reduce (1) the risk of transmission from unvaccinated people and (2) the risk of severe or critical illness among unvaccinated people. We call this method the number needed to isolate, or “NNI”. The NNI is the number of unvaccinated people needed to isolate on any given day to prevent (1) one transmission event in a given type of community setting or (2) one case of severe or critical illness.

The arithmetic behind the NNI is simple and the data are publicly available. I refer you to our paper for details. We examined the NNI across the United States and in other countries during the fall 2021. The NNI data are alarming. In Maryland, we found that on any given day about 1,000 to 4,000 unvaccinated people needed to be excluded from accessing various types of community settings, including working in healthcare, in order to prevent one transmission event. Note, this is to prevent usually mild, sometimes asymptomatic, infections, especially given the high levels of immunity which already existed in the population during this period. The NNIs were even higher for preventing one case of severe or critical illness among unvaccinated people under the age of 50.

In medicine, there is a clinical intuition that if you have to apply an intervention to hundreds or thousands of people to extract one benefit, a careful weighing of benefits vs. harms is needed. The harms of vaccine mandates are substantial and immediate, including unemployment, exclusion from education, stigmatization, and restriction of liberties. Therefore, my testimony is one of proportionality and compassion. We may disagree with the viewpoints and decisions of others. But we must consider the harms of excluding unvaccinated people using vaccine mandate policies relative to the small benefits of these policies.

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