

December 6, 2016

TO: Senator Frank LaRose, Chairman
Members of Senate Transportation, Commerce, and Labor Committee

From: Kelli Arthur Hykes, Director of Public Health Policy

RE: HB154 Proponent Testimony, Written Remarks

I write today representing Health Commissioner Dr. Teresa Long, Columbus Board of Health, and the over 850,000 residents of Columbus and Worthington that we serve. We appreciate the opportunity to share our support for bicycling by encouraging you to clarify what “safe passing” means by requiring a minimum of three feet when passing a cyclist.

At Columbus Public Health, our number one priority is the health and safety of the community. As you all know, cycling is a very heart-healthy way to commute and is enjoyable recreation for many in our state. And while the physical and environmental benefits are numerous, as public health officials, we are always interested in mitigating the risks involved, including serious injury and death in the event of an accident. Ohio’s safety laws need to be updated to protect the cyclist on our roadways and provide consistent rules to automobile drivers across the many different political jurisdictions of the state.

According to the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, there were 1,373 total crashes involving bicycles in Central Ohio between 2009 and 2013. That’s an average of 275 bicycle crashes per year, just in our community. And bicyclists are especially vulnerable in collisions with motor vehicles: more than 10 percent of bicycle crashes resulted in a fatality or serious injury, compared to 2.3 percent of all crashes during that same period. The single greatest contributing factor in bicycle crashes – cited in 30 percent of the reported crashes – is the failure to yield by motor vehicles. Ensuring that people on bicycles are given at least 3 feet of safe passing distance will help all road users share the road more safely and reduce the number of crashes, as evidenced by lower crash, injury and fatality rates in states like our neighbors in West Virginia that reported zero bicycle deaths in 2014.

Today, no less than 21 states have laws on the books that clarify a safe passing distance to at least 3 feet. Last June, Columbus joined Cincinnati and Cleveland, as well as several smaller local governments, in explicitly defining a safe passing distance to at least three feet for standard vehicles (oversized commercial vehicles are required to provide six feet). This was an important step for us to address the reality that just outside this building on High Street,



Broad Street, not far on Sullivant Avenue and Lane Avenue, are areas that have the most bike and pedestrian crashes in our community. In areas with high density automobile and bike traffic, it was imperative that our laws adapt to the growing need to share the road. But as we noted before, as we see more and more people becoming aware of the local law, consistency across the state is necessary. Not just for Columbus, which has such a huge influx of visitors from around the state that would benefit from consistent traffic laws, but also for suburban and rural communities that are also experiencing a large growth in cycling—a 64% increase in commuting by bike since the 90's.

In conclusion, Columbus Public Health is supportive of HB125 because it is a reasonable and sensible way to help make a healthy activity safer and more welcoming to new bike riders, as well as provide consistent definition of a reasonable passing distance for automobile drivers. Thank you for your time and for considering this traffic law in the context of promoting public health.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at 614-645-2097 or KAHYKES@columbus.gov and I will respond promptly on behalf of Columbus Public Health.