

HB624 Proponent Testimony

Heather Groves

House State and Local Government Committee

June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020

Chairman Wiggam, Ranking Member Kelly and Distinguished Members of the State and Local Government Committee:

My name is Heather Groves and I am a Licensed Nurse with almost a dozen years of nursing experience in the state of Ohio. As a nurse and as an Ohioan, I thank you the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 624, which would require the reporting and release of certain COVID-19 testing and related information, including information on negative covid19 test results, separate reporting on congregate setting fatalities versus community setting fatalities and current vs cumulative covid19 infections.

It is my belief that Governor DeWine and Dr. Acton have cherry picked what Covid19 data they wish to relay to Ohioans, resulting in unnecessary fear and panic across the state, as well as the continuation of overreaching and nonsensical public health orders. I have watched as worst case scenarios are touted as commonplace and as those who have recovered from Covid19 are referred to as "Covid19 Survivors", while those who have suffered from the most severe side effects and health outcomes have been invited to broadcast their troubling but very rare stories to the entire state during the daily Covid19 press conferences. These scare tactics are further propagated by the lack of accurate and necessary data reporting by the Ohio Department of Health, Dr. Acton and Governor DeWine.

An article titled "Lack of details: States vary on reporting nursing home COVID-19 deaths, frustrating families" reported that "state and local health officials nationwide have faced increasing scrutiny over the collection and release of infection data for long-term care facilities, whose residents are among the most susceptible to COVID-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus, and its complications...States have adopted their own standards with mixed results...Where limited information has been made public, the amount and its accuracy has raised questions at a time when public health experts say knowing where the virus is spreading

is crucial to preventing future outbreaks and allocating testing kits, supplies and protective equipment." We have seen this play out in Ohio, where during the week of May 10th, Dr. Amy Acton stated that 22% of Ohio Covid19 deaths were attributed to nursing home residents. On May 14th, Cleveland.com reported that this number was grossly inaccurate, and accused ODH of failing to release timely and accurate nursing home covid19 infection and fatality data as previously promised. It was later reported by state and national media that nursing home deaths have accounted for an astounding 70-79% of all Ohio Covid19 fatalities. When you add other congregant setting infection and mortality rates to this number, you can deduce that community based covid19 mortality is insignificant compared to congregate settings, however the majority of the state covid19 restrictions disproportionately affect individuals and small businesses in the community.

My local health department has done an amazing job of reporting relevant data, including active, cumulative and recovered infections, current hospitalizations vs discharged patients, and the percentage of community acquired, occupational exposure, travel exposure and close contact exposure on the overall rate; they also report the local prison cases separately. When asked, however, Dr. Acton continues to claim that due to lags in reporting and the lack of centralized reporting tools, she is unable to report this vital information for the state. I cannot help but to question this narrative when I am seeing local health departments and municipalities accurately report this information on an ongoing basis.

When the Department of Health is given the authority to unilaterally impose restrictions on every facet of our daily lives, we must insist that they are transparent and honest in their reporting of all data that is relevant to whether those restrictions are continued or are lifted. Ohioans have done their part in ensuring that the Covid19 curve was flattened, and now I ask that our legislators do theirs by passing HB 624 and holding ODH accountable in their reporting of this any future health emergency situation. Thank you so much for your time and consideration in this matter, and for giving me this opportunity to share my support for House Bill 624.

Sincerely,

Heather Groves

<sup>i</sup><https://www.lohud.com/story/news/politics/2020/05/05/data-withheld-how-states-vary-reporting-covid-19-nursing-home-deaths/3076352001/><sup>ii</sup>

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<sup>iii</sup><https://www.cleveland.com/coronavirus/2020/05/ohio-fails-to-release-new-coronavirus-nursing-home-data-as-promised-on-wednesday.html>

<sup>iiii</sup>[https://www.wmfd.com/article/governor-dewine-suppresses-data-disproving-covid-19-policies/3899?fbclid=IwAR2\\_B6FOYvEZnELxyFg-tl2FcEFVeDN9Qo\\_QB1\\_T0UT7aOb4VHOjVEMj3Ho](https://www.wmfd.com/article/governor-dewine-suppresses-data-disproving-covid-19-policies/3899?fbclid=IwAR2_B6FOYvEZnELxyFg-tl2FcEFVeDN9Qo_QB1_T0UT7aOb4VHOjVEMj3Ho)