

Proponent Testimony – Kathy L. Johnson
House Bill 624
State and Local Government Committee
June 3, 2020

Chair Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and Members of the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present proponent testimony on behalf of House Bill 624. I am grateful to Representative Diane Grendell and to the co-sponsors of the Bill for their prudence in producing this critical and very timely legislation. HB 624 specifies and defines the exact COVID-19 statistics and data points that are vitally necessary in order for Ohio citizens and our elected officials to understand and discern the reality of this crisis that we have already endured for three long months. The fear has not, and will not, come to rest without genuine statistics being made available to all Ohioans and to our Ohio legislators.

It is incredible to me that we must legislatively demand transparency in statistics from the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), but that is the situation that we are currently facing in Ohio.

We have confronted an unprecedented crisis where our health system, economy, and personal freedoms have been involuntarily determined for us by the Governor and Health Director based on imprecise and single-sided numbers. This has affected our primary election, the operation of our schools, and in many cases, our personal livelihoods. Many small businesses will not survive. Massive unemployment and the inevitable despair and uncertainty that often accompanies job loss hit hard and continues to soar in Ohio. Healthy Ohioans were quarantined and confined to our homes for weeks. Social issues of domestic violence, suicide, drug, and alcohol use have increased. Amidst the chaos, Ohioans have lived in fear of seeking necessary medical care because so many dreaded what was envisioned as near-certain death from contracting COVID-19; this is far from accurate for the majority of the population.

We certainly know that early modeling was dramatically erroneous; this was unfortunate. But the daily data released by the ODH has since been consistently incomplete and weighted to promote an environment of fear and despondency among the population. The daily data has been centered on illness and death by focusing the reporting on cumulative confirmed cases, cumulative hospitalizations, and cumulative confirmed or suspected COVID-19 death numbers. This failed reporting model must be replaced by full data transparency. The only reasonable solution is for precise and complete statistics to be defined and mandated by Ohio law; HB 624 does exactly that.

Representative Grendell summarized the un-reported data in her sponsor testimony and I reiterate her statement:

What has not been publicly reported is the other half of the story:

- *The number of confirmed cases that did not require any medical care;*
- *The number of patients who were treated and released from the hospital;*
- *The number of individuals who tested negative;*
- *The number of deaths that did not involve nursing home residents or prison inmates;*
- *Number of individuals with contributing factors such as diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and pulmonary issues.*

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It was a stunning revelation to find a news report on the Statehouse News Bureau website which stated, in a May 21 article, that 79% of all COVID-19 deaths in Ohio were in the nursing home population.¹ This percentage would naturally increase when we factor in other congregant populations such as prisons. We need the data!

How many of the deaths recorded in the high-risk populations actually died from COVID-19 as opposed to having died with COVID-19? Have deaths of those with underlying, serious health conditions been counted as COVID-19 deaths when the cause of death was due to one or more critical and pre-existing health conditions? Every death is a tragedy, of course, but proper reporting is a must. We need the data!

It is imperative to include all relative statistics including negative test results, hospital admissions, and subsequent hospital discharges. We need to know the numbers of asymptomatic cases, mild infections, and recuperations. These are more positive data points that would reduce fear and give us a full understanding of the facts. We need the data!

It is especially sensible and important that HB 624 was written to include a declaration of emergency for the immediate preservation of the public peace, health, and safety. The act is written to go into immediate effect, which is absolutely necessary.

I am asking for all esteemed Members of the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee to support and fast-track this important legislation. Please vote favorably for the advancement of HB 624 from the Committee to the House floor. And please support HB 624 when it comes before the full House for a vote.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹Huge Percentage of Ohio COVID-19 Deaths Come from Nursing Homes, by Karen Kasler May 21, 2020