



Ohio Environmental Council [Action Fund]

Opponent Testimony of Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund House Bill 671- Health Orders (As Introduced) Presented to the House State & Local Government Committee June 3, 2020

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and Members of the House State & Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present opponent testimony of House Bill 671 (“HB671”). My name is Trent Dougherty, General Counsel for the Ohio Environmental Council Action Fund.

The collective efforts of the state of Ohio and Ohioans to fight COVID-19 for the past few months has made one thing perfectly clear: **science matters**. From coronavirus to climate change, we face dire consequences when we ignore the experts and the facts. This is why OEC Action Fund places science at the center of our efforts and our advocacy for clean air, clean water, and vibrant public lands. To protect our environment and the health of our communities we must trust sound science, and trust the expertise of those scientific professionals.

The OEC Action Fund opposes HB671 due to its direct attacks on the expertise of our state’s health experts and puts profit over science. Instead of combating the public health crisis by utilizing the expertise of local and state public health experts and flexibility and agility of our local communities to react to community based impacts, this bill adds more barriers. Specifically, we urge a no vote on HB 671 because the bill:

- Curbs the ability of local boards of health to protect the citizens within its jurisdiction in an emergency caused by an epidemic of a contagious disease like the current COVID-19 crisis, by:
 - generally prohibiting local boards of health from issuing orders to prevent or restrict disease when the Department of Health has issued an order for the same epidemic, and
 - limiting the effectiveness of any orders issued by a board of health to not more than 14 days, unless extended by the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (or JCARR);
- Puts the health and safety of state workers by specifying that orders of the Department of Health or a board of health do not apply to the General Assembly, state courts, state departments, and state correctional institutions; and
- Grants businesses the right to flood county courts if they disagree with public health protection orders.

There are opportunities for the General Assembly and our lawmakers to be involved in guiding how Ohio protects Ohioans through the COVID-19 pandemic and the local and statewide economic recession that follows it. However, not trusting the science and not leading with local boards of health is not the answer.

Thank you for considering our position and perspective.

