

**Proponent Testimony
HB 624**

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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 HB 624, the COVID reporting transparency bill.

As a former legislator, I fully appreciate the challenges you are facing in these unprecedented times.

As a judge, when I swear in a witness, I ask them to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

Who, possibly, could be an opponent of the truth?

When it comes to reporting to Ohioans important information about COVID-19, Ohioans are entitled to the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Unfortunately, that has not been the case the past three months.

Everyday at 2:00pm, the Ohio Department of Health releases half the facts to the public – the scary half of the facts:

- Cumulative number of confirmed cases
- Cumulative number of hospitalized patients
- Cumulative number of alleged or suspected COVID deaths

However, ODH has not released these other facts at the 2:00pm press conferences, which are important to provide Ohioans with the context of the scary set of facts:

- Percentage of confirmed cases that were asymptomatic and required no medical attention
- Current number hospitalized – not the cumulative number

- Actual deaths from COVID in the last 24 hours
- Age of those who unfortunately passed away, whether they were residing in nursing homes/prisons, the number who were over 70/80, and the number with serious comorbidity factors

In other words, as Paul Harvey used to say, “the rest of the story.”

Why is releasing all the facts important?

When the COVID crisis started in early March, decisions were based on what we now know were clearly erroneous models.

In March, ODH told Ohioans that we were going to experience a plague of biblical proportions with 10,000 Ohioans being infected daily by mid-April. Ohio hospitals were going to overrun with COVID patients.

Businesses were ordered closed, schools were closed, Ohioans were ordered to stay at home. Massive unemployment followed.

By April 9, it became clear that fortunately, the impact of COVID, especially on Ohioans under the age of 50, was nowhere near the dire model predictions.

Unfortunately, the early ODH modeling information, coupled with the media drumbeat of COVID fear and death, created an atmosphere of fear.

This atmosphere of fear could have been abated, if, in mid-April, ODH had started to inform the public as to the whole truth about the COVID-19 situation in Ohio.

Unfortunately, ODH continues to release daily the negative information:

- Cumulative confirmed cases
- Cumulative hospitalizations
- Cumulative deaths without contextual data

For example:

- May 31, 2020 update:
 - 33,073 confirmed cases
 - 6,049 hospitalizations

- 1,556 ICU admissions
- 2,155 total deaths

Based on this information, many Ohioans remain scared and fearful of returning to normal life activities.

The Atmosphere of Fear remains.

How hard would it be for ODH to also include in the 2:00pm press conferences:

- Number of confirmed cases that required little or no medical treatment
- Number currently hospitalized
- The number of current ICU admissions
- The daily actual deaths (not “reported” deaths) – knowing that 5 people actually died in the last 24 hours, not 50 deaths reported is important
- The age and comorbidity factor contribution to the deaths and whether they were in nursing homes/prisons (79% of deaths, 1,707 have been in nursing homes)

The general public has a right to know that only 448 Ohioans not in nursing homes have died from COVID-19, and that includes at least 66 prison inmates. That is an average of 80 per month since January, or about 3 deaths per day. To put this into perspective, before COVID-19, Ohio averaged 320 deaths per day over the last 10 years.

Providing the whole COVID story is important because the atmosphere of fear, the resulting business closures, and the lengthy stay-at-home period has had other damaging results for Ohioans:

- Domestic violence
- Suicides
- Opioid deaths – e.g. Franklin County had 49 opioid deaths in April, 2020
- Reports that individuals suffering heart attacks and strokes in their homes failed or fatally delayed calling 911 because of the fear of catching COVID-19 in the hospital
- Infants not receiving medical care
- Pregnant women not receiving prenatal care

- Juvenile unruly cases
- Mental health civil commitments

As Ohio struggles to return to normal, Ohioans need to know the current number of hospitalizations, actual number of deaths, and number of cases currently requiring medical treatment.

More people died in Ohio and the U.S. during the first 4 months of 2018 than the first 4 months of 2020.

There were no statewide school or business closures in 2018.

There were no stay at home orders in 2018.

The Chief of Staff of the University Hospitals System Geauga Hospital recently told me that for Ohioans under 50, the seasonal flu presents a bigger health risk than COVID-19.

As Ohioans struggle to return to work and live their lives, they deserve to know all of the facts, so that they can make reasoned and informed decisions based on facts, not fear.

Thank you.