

Verbal SB311 Proponent Testimony

Dawn Combs

House and State Local Government Committee

November 18, 2020

Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and Members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for inviting me to give proponent testimony for SB311.

My name is Dawn Combs. When I was 18 a man held me down in a small space under the staircase at the entrance to my dorm, covered my face and denied me the right to choose what happens to my body. A male friend of mine the next day, when I had to explain my odd, paranoid behavior, suggested that I brought it on myself because I had worn a short skirt.

Today, I am claustrophobic and prone to anxiety attacks with alarming physical manifestations any time I feel backed into a corner, deprived of a means of escape or get into a situation where I am denied agency. I cannot wear a mask or any other type of facial covering as a result.

Every order that has been put into writing has included provisions for myself and others like me. Unfortunately, words matter. The governor has used his words throughout this pandemic to craft a culture of judgement, hatred and shame towards those who do not mask. The mandates that have been put into place have created an environment where businesses are bullied to pressure me every time I attempt to enter places such as the grocery store to buy food for my family. I am forced to relive my trauma each and every time I leave the house because I dread the hate, the anger at the door and the need to explain myself. And I HAVE been asked to share details to doorkeepers. I resent that I have survived one abuser and have gained another.

I understand the pressures being placed on businesses as well. I am an author and professional speaker with a nationally respected line of botanical supplements. I have a brick and mortar space in my family's hometown. My husband and I have forged the relationship with the FDA for our industry in Ohio. We have been on the market for almost 16 years and we have been successful because we create a clean and safe product and we follow all applicable laws and regulations. Chief among those is a requirement that we make no claims and that we do not offer to "treat" or "diagnose" anyone. Throughout a very troubling time within the herbal industry, we have never had problems with the FDA because we do not tell anyone what health decisions they should make, be it in one of my books, an article I write for national media, from a stage, on our labels, or in our shop.

We have progressed from a recommendation to mask, to mandatory masking and now to businesses being required to police the public on their health choices. This has all been directed by one person with no input from the general assembly or representation of my voice that I can see. I am caught in the middle.

My business is threatened by the state because I am legally not able to force people to make health decisions that are between them and their doctor.

My freedom to enjoy access to society in any other manner other than as a second-class citizen is threatened because I was sexually assaulted. I am victimized daily, threatened, jeered at and belittled as I attempt to do basic things that others take for granted like pick out the least bruised apples or the most nutritious steak to serve my children.

C.S. Lewis said "Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It would be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron's cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end for they do so with the approval of their own conscience."

The General Assembly has allowed the governor the unchecked power to continue my victimization. Ohio's House and Senate have been the male friend from my first attack, standing idly to the side for the past 9 months and blaming me for failing to control the behavior of others. These bodies are not protecting me or others like me and I now ask that you do something about that. This bill will simply put the checks and balances back in their rightful place. Ohio's Health Department, as an unelected body, was never meant to rule over my life or make decisions about whether or not I can eat, work or move about. This bill will allow my representative a seat at the table when health orders are being discussed. It will ensure that there is not just one or two people deciding for all of us in Ohio how we are best served in health and wellness. More voices mean that more of us who are threatened might come to light and not remain unrepresented, unaccounted for and unprotected.

Thank you for your time and for allowing me to speak in favor of Senate Bill 311.