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## **Sponsor Testimony**

Senate Bill 348

Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee

September 1, 2020

Chairman Burke, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on SB 348.

Senator Schaffer has done a thorough job explaining the content of the bill. I will therefore focus my comments on expanding upon the reasons why SB348 is indeed sound policy for the State of Ohio.

First at foremost, this bill recognizes the fact that communities across this state are diverse and that a one size fits all – top down approach - is not ideal. For example, the Village of Northfield, in the Summit County portion of my district, has a population of about 3,600 people, spread out over just 1.0 square mile. That equates to a population density of about 3,600 people per square mile. Plain Township in Wayne County has a similar population of about 3,100, however, it is spread over 81.4 square miles—or about 38 people per square mile. It's easy to understand that a health order which makes sense for Northfield with 3,600 people/sq mi might not make any sense at all for Plain Township with 38 people/square mi.

Statewide health orders simply cannot account for the tremendous differences between communities in a state as diverse as ours. Empowering local health districts and medical officials to reject state orders that would disproportionately and negatively harm their communities is a common-sense way the legislature can protect communities in our state from unintended consequences that arise from overly-broad state mandates.

Second, government, whether it is local or state, should be structured and designed to defend the rights and freedoms of our citizens. When local communities unduly restrict the rights of citizens, the state should intervene on their behalf. Similarly, when the state erodes civil liberties, local entities should be empowered to counteract excess use of state power. Local control and central governments, when properly designed and utilized, should provide a check

and balance to each other's potential overreach in order to protect individual freedom and civil liberty. This bill supports that broad principle by strengthening local health districts to provide an additional layer of review to state orders that might impinge individual freedom. It is worth mentioning that the voting threshold for local health districts to do so requires a supermajority vote by the board in order to ensure that this power to reject state orders is only exercised in certain cases—those where there is extremely sound evidence that embracing the order would have significant negative consequences to the overall well-being of the community.

Finally, the bill's changes to the makeup of local health boards will improve accountability and expertise. Increasing the number of healthcare professionals on the board will help to ensure that each of Ohio's 113 local health departments have an abundant supply of medical expertise and ability. By adding business representation community to each board, we are equipping local health districts to better understand how their decisions will impact the economy, an important factor in the overall health of the community they represent. Moreover, ensuring that all health departments—not just those with health district licensing councils—are structurally equipped to understand the needs of businesses can only improve the dialogue and discussions that take place. Better decisions generally result when decision-makers have more opportunity to weigh the concerns of all stakeholders—which is what these changes are designed to promote.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of SB348; we would be happy to take any questions at this time.