

Testimony of Michelle Cotterman, RN CNHP
Support HB 90
State and Local Government
February 17, 2021

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly and honorable members of the State and Local Government Committee: Thank you for considering my written proponent testimony on House Bill 90, which will allow for the legislative oversight of the Governor's executive orders, certain public health orders and emergency rules.

My name is Michelle Cotterman. I am a mother, a registered nurse, a natural health professional, and a sovereign human being who lives in the state of Ohio. It has been a very unfortunate, yet eye opening experience over the last 10 months, which has brought a series of significant problems to light. Primarily, we learned that through a 100-year-old statute, the Governor and the Health Department have unilateral power and ultimate authority when it comes to issuing orders related to public health states of emergency.

Ohioans watched as these orders were issued without any input from the legislature. We watched as the judicial branch, despite rulings that the orders were unconstitutional^{1 2}, were ultimately ignored by the executive branch and unelected Health Department.

I am concerned that the Governor and the Health Department have tunnel vision and have vastly ignored indirect outcomes of economic and social burden, including deaths resulting from lockdown. The increased stress from economic hardships leading to increased drug overdoses, suicides, domestic violence, and the inability for Ohioans to receive "non-essential" healthcare has led to an increase in indirect deaths related to COVID19. On May 21, 2020, the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons wrote a letter to former Vice President Mike Pence, the then Chair of the United States Coronavirus Task Force. The letter was signed by hundreds of physicians and medical professionals. In the letter they state:

*"Our patients have suffered needlessly in pain and physical decline with disease progression because of short-sighted government edicts to stop all non-emergency care that is unrelated to COVID19. Some patients now face inevitable death because the diagnosis and treatments were delayed too long. Too many of our patients have suffered far more from the psychological, physical, and economic effects of the shutdown of communities and businesses than the direct impact of COVID19 itself."*³

¹ <https://ohioconstitution.org/ohio-court-health-departments-cannot-suspend-licenses-over-masks/>

² <https://ohioconstitution.org/another-ohio-court-slams-forced-closures-as-unconstitutional/>

³ Association of American Physicians and Surgeons. 2020. Letter to Vice President Mike Pence [PDF File]. Retrieved from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qLidZSYRxeX7oIvysL693szBwTiRyDOX7/view?usp=drivesdk>

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A new study by authors at Duke University, Harvard Medical School, and the Johns Hopkins University business school has concluded that the unemployment spike and recession caused by the response to the pandemic can jeopardize population health for the next few decades. They found that over the next 20 years, 1.37 million more people will die than would have died without the unemployment shock the pandemic response caused and that these deaths will disproportionately affect African-Americans.⁴ Likewise, the Health Policy Institute of Ohio found in its 2019 report that “Ohioans face poorer health outcomes including...those that have lower incomes or education attainment.” They define “barriers to being healthy...a job that pays a self-sufficient income, quality housing and increased exposure to adverse childhood experiences”.⁵ Undoubtedly, we can see all of these effects multiplied as a result of the response to the pandemic.

I am also concerned that the Governor accepted advice solely from a small group of professionals who are only trained in pharmaceutical-based, allopathic healthcare methods when directing his response to the pandemic. It is highly probable that these experts and their associated medical trade organizations have financial relationships with the medical device and pharmaceutical industries who seek to profit from the outcome of their advised direction. There is, unfortunately, much potential for extensive corruption and pay-to-play politics that holds the balance of lives and livelihoods of Ohioans in its grip.⁶ I would like to see a wider panel of experience included during the decision-making process when it comes to future pandemic response in the state of Ohio. I believe that it is time for an overhaul of this over 100-year-old law and HB 90 will achieve these much needed changes.

The government has an ultimate duty to uphold and protect our God given constitutionally protected rights, which includes an established checks and balances system on all branches of government. Ohioans are increasingly growing tired of unilateral decisions that are tone-deaf to their concerns, have cut out the legislative branch and ignored court rulings stating the administration's orders are unconstitutional. It is time for the legislature to dial in the powers that have allowed this overreach to occur in the first place.

Please, vote yes on HB 90.

⁴ Bianchi, F., Bianchi, G., & Song, D. (2020). The Long-Term Impact of the COVID-19 Unemployment Shock on Life Expectancy and Mortality Rates. *National Bureau of Economic Research*.
<https://doi.org/10.3386/w28304>

⁵ Health Policy Institute of Ohio. (2019). 2019 Health Value Dashboard. Retrieved February 13, 2021, from <http://hpio.net/2019-health-value-dashboard/>

⁶ Moynihan, R. (2020). Financial ties between leaders of influential US professional medical associations and industry: cross sectional study. *Bmj*, m1505. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m1505