

Written testimony for HB 90:

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairman John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Reform Committee,

My name is Dr. Gina Patterson, Psy.D. I am writing this testimony as a private citizen and not associated with any agency or organization. I am writing this testimony as person with a doctoral degree in clinical psychology and a person with a physical disability.

I support HB 90 because I believe there must be a balance in power in our state. No one politician should have the amount of power to shut down businesses, schools, medical offices, etc for an extensive period of time.

First, as a person with a disability. I have always felt like society does not really care about me and others with disabilities, but COVID has reinforced my belief 1000%. I am a congenital amputee. I do not have arms beyond my elbows. I do not have hands. It is almost impossible to put on a mask without fingers and hands. I do have a face shield that I can wear; however, because of my disability I use my chin, cheek, and shoulder to hold items so the shield impacts my ability to carry out tasks. Some businesses and retail companies refuse to allow me to enter without a cloth mask. They claim that online shopping/ordering or curbside service is the “accommodation.” That is not the same service. Online ordering is not the same as accompanying my teenager into the store to try on clothes to see if they fit. Online ordering is not the same as quickly grabbing a needed item in a store. Many persons in poverty cannot get credit cards to do online ordering and curbside pick-up. Many people with disabilities live in poverty. Why is an able-bodied person allowed in a store and I am not? I’m assuming that this will be precedent for not reducing architectural barriers to public places. The “accommodation” can be “online” everything. This will completely remove persons with physical disabilities from the public world and banish them to their homes. Is that the person of these rules to remove persons with disabilities from the public eye because people do not want to see us or have to deal with us and our needs?

You may say, the Governor has an exemption in his order. I have this order printed and the exemption highlighted. I clearly and visibly have no hands and no way to put on a mask without assistance. Businesses say they are private and have a right to bar persons unable to wear masks from their establishments. I have written to Disability Rights Ohio and ACLU and there has been no response. Thus, back to my first statement that society does not care about persons with disabilities and Ohio law is NOT enforcing the rights of Ohioans with disabilities.

My second reason for this written testimony is my expertise in behavioral health as a person with a doctorate degree in Clinical Psychology. The shutdowns, restrictions, mandates, orders, etc are destroying the mental health of Ohioans and must be kept in check by a balance of power. The shutdowns, etc are especially harmful to persons under the age of 25 due to all of the milestones in their lives. Teen and young adult mental health issues and suicides are at an all time high. According to SAMHSA (Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Association), suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth. They are missing sports, activities, and performing arts essential to mental health and positive activities to reduce substance abuse. They are missing graduations, proms, and homecomings. Persons in recovery from addiction are missing in-person services and support and are relapsing and overdosing at record rates.

Domestic Violence is frightening. Abusers use the shut-downs, mandates, and restrictions to keep spouses and children locked in homes and unable to escape. The lack of in-home services, school etc keeps these abuses hidden.

Finally, by having only one person making all the life decisions for an entire state, it takes away the voice and choice of people. People who have no voice are oppressed. People who have no voice are helpless and powerless which leads to depression. Ohioans should be able to make health choices for themselves. Ohioans should be able to make risk-benefit choices about health risks for themselves. Ohioans do not need one person making these decisions for them.

According to the Center for Disease Control, approximately 480,000 persons die from smoking each year in the United States. This is a similar number as COVID deaths. However, smoking is legal. If this was really about saving lives, why are other dangerous things permitted.

Respectfully Submitted By:

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gina L. Patterson, Psy.D." The signature is written in a cursive style.

Dr. Gina L. Patterson, Psy.D.

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