

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the State and Local Government committee:

My name is Dr. Anne Worth and I am a Family Medicine physician in Columbus, Ohio. I am writing in strong opposition to House Bill 90, which would rescind or limit life-saving health orders during a time of health crisis. In Family Medicine, prevention is a key component of the care we provide. We know that it is far better to prevent illness in the first place than to hope for a cure when someone gets sick. As we have seen this year, medicine does not have a treatment for every ailment.

Our Department of Health and Governor's office need to be able to act swiftly--and according to the best scientific evidence that we have available--to save lives during a public health crisis. It is far more costly--both for the health of the individual and the health of the economy--to treat rather than prevent disease. We must do both.

House Bill 90 sets aside the powers of the Department of Health and the Governor's office, and instead entrusts a committee of 10 legislators to make public health decisions. None of these committee members need to have a background in public health, in science, or in medicine. Unlike the Governor's office and the Ohio Department of Health, which must act for the benefit of all Ohioans, these committee members will be beholden to the voters in their own district, rather than beholden to public health and scientific consensus. Make no mistake, this bill trades science for pseudoscience.

I have lost many patients to COVID-19 this year, and I have grieved for each of them. I'm wondering, who have you grieved for this year? This week--this very week--we have passed 500,000 deaths in the United States from COVID-19. The rate of death from the virus in this country is in the top 20% of developed countries. Why is that? Other countries have benefitted from swift government and public support for public health measures that we know--through research--are effective at mitigating the spread of the virus---wearing a mask, social distancing, limiting the size of gatherings, and contact tracing.

But what is at stake in this bill is not what has already happened, but how we continue to fight COVID-19, and how we will meet the next public health crisis. How will we respond to water contamination, bioterrorism, or another pandemic? House Bill 90 kneecaps the very department that is best equipped to act quickly and without political motives. Allow public health experts to make public health decisions.

We all want the health of our loved ones, the health of our economy, and the health of our communities. These aims are not mutually exclusive. Public health measures protect the wellbeing of all of us. Ongoing death and morbidity do nothing to help economic outcomes. I implore you not to undermine the very department that is so crucial for responding to health crises.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote No on this dangerous bill. Thank you for your time.

-Dr. Anne Worth