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Proponent Testimony for H.B. 90
Ohio House State and Local Government Committee Hearing
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Good afternoon Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair (and former County Commissioner colleague) John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee.

My name is Casey Kozlowski, I have the privilege of serving the residents of Ashtabula County as their County Commissioner since 2014 and as their State Representative in the 129th General Assembly. I made the long trip down to Columbus, along with our County Auditor David Thomas who submitted written testimony to you, to share with the committee and display just how important the democratic principles of checks and balances and oversight are to the people of Ashtabula County and why H.B. 90 must be passed this General Assembly.

I, like many of you, and most of Ohio, believed strongly in flattening the curve and taking strong measures nearly a year ago to stop the spread of COVID-19. I know as an executive; occasionally quick action is necessary in times of crisis. In March and April of 2020, we did not know the virus, how it affected the body, how it spread from person to person, and how to treat the illness.

During that time Governor DeWine's health orders and mandates from the State Department of Health can be understood and appreciated. One can see why in short intervals, a state of emergency, stay at home orders, statewide mandates were necessary.

What I strongly believe, and have heard consistently from my constituents, and wish to channel to you this afternoon, is the need for oversight, accountability, checks and balances, and limited government to return to our state and my county. The provisions in HB 90, to create an oversight committee with strong powers is one of the action steps needed during this time of crisis.

During my tenure as a state legislator, similar to you, I took my oath of office to heart remembering to uphold Ohio's constitutional values. I wish to thank you for being a voice for

these principles over this past year when days turned to weeks and weeks to months with only executive branch orders and mandates and no legislative oversight. Our system works best with input and with we as elected officials always knowing there is someone there to hold us accountable.

I can share as a County Commissioner as well, my personal frustration at seeing the issues played out at the state level trickling down to my county. Similar to the small businesses being closed while big box stores stayed open and sporting events allowed to be held while small town gatherings were banned, my residents have now long suffered with inconsistent rule making not only by the state executive but by the State Health Department orders carried out by local Health Departments.

Without a seat at the table, County Commissioners are unable to be the voice of the people and have a say with interpretations and orders. As it stands, local health departments answer to the state health department which answers to the governor. That's not limited government, nor accessible government, it's government by unaccountable individuals who may truly believe they are doing the right thing, but are not having to report to the representatives of the people.

In passing HB 90 and instilling an oversight committee, you are not playing politics with a health crisis, you are reinforcing the bedrock of democracy that the people govern the state and not the other way around. I also ask you to consider adding statutorily the requirement for County Commissioners or local leadership to serve on Health Boards as well.

I am happy to share firsthand accounts and frustrations with you from conversations with small business owners, community nonprofits, regular folks who are doing the right things, but by virtue of big government are being punished unfairly. Ashtabula County is a rural, small town community. One that I know our governor is not intentionally harming by means of economic hardships, mental health concerns with students, and long-term social consequences from his orders. But these negative effects are occurring now, with perhaps the best of intentions. Imagine a governor down the road who does not have the legislature to keep watch and hold him or her accountable. The steps you take now with HB 90, ensure that today's executive branch and future administrations remember to have the voice of the people always at their forefront.

With that serving as my testimony today, I am happy to take any questions. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Casey R. Kozlowski

Ashtabula County Commissioner