



Ashtabula County Auditor David Thomas

25 West Jefferson Street
Jefferson, Ohio 44047-1092
Phone: 440-576-3783 ~ Fax: 440-576-3797
auditor@ashtabulacountyauditor.org

Proponent Testimony for H.B. 90
Ohio House State and Local Government Committee Hearing
February 24, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Wiggam, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee.

My name is David Thomas and I serve as the County Auditor for Ashtabula County in Northeast Ohio. I represent just shy of 100,000 Ohioans who are very hearty folks enduring our long and snow filled winters and rust belt Appalachian economic conditions.

I share this perspective of countless residents who feel voiceless under the Governor and State Health Department's Executive Orders and States of Emergency. They have turned to us as local officials to work on their behalf, much as I am sure many of your residents have looked to you as their voice in Columbus.

Our system of government works because of checks and balances, the principle of oversight and accountability from the people and other branches and levels of government. Without this, the people lose faith in their representatives and question government's authority and effectiveness.

A state of emergency and executive actions lasting over a year without checks and balances is not reflective of good, democratic government, nor is it reflective of a true emergency. It is symbolic of out of touch, overreaching government. You as Representatives are the true voice of the people in Columbus. Over the past year, I and my residents have followed many of your attempts to speak on the will of a majority of Ohioans-

Ohioans who say that individual responsibility should trump government orders

Ohioans who believe small businesses have as many rights as large box stores

Ohioans who see exceptions to mandates given to big business and sporting events, while small community theaters and schools have been closed

Like me, I am sure all of you have had countless conversations with your constituents who are out of work due to the Governor's restrictions, who have fallen behind economically during this past year, who see their tax dollars going towards empty buildings and lack of services.



Ashtabula County Auditor David Thomas

25 West Jefferson Street
Jefferson, Ohio 44047-1092
Phone: 440-576-3783 ~ Fax: 440-576-3797
auditor@ashtabulacountyauditor.org

This is why I am so excited to share the opinion of my home county in support of HB 90. *The positive results of the creation of oversight and accountability through this Ohio Health Oversight and Advisory Committee cannot be understated.* Government should never be afraid of oversight. The legislature, your involvement in asking questions and representing the voice of Ohioans, is so vital to buy in and the democratic process.

As the governor has said over and over, this past year's executive orders, regulations, delaying of an election, and mandates have been his sole decision. Actions of this magnitude should not be left to one man, or even one department. They should be dissected for what is best for Ohioans and constantly reviewed by those directly accountable to the people.

Even when left to local health departments for interpretation, the lack of oversight is evident. In Ashtabula County, I have witnessed first-hand what not having local leaders involved on a Health Department's Board or with decision making has meant for our county's businesses. What is allowed in bordering counties has been banned in our community. What could be settled through local oversight, is instead unilaterally determined. The state appeal process is ineffective and unresponsive. Legal action is costly to remedy clear inequities.

Certainly, when the virus first appeared in Ohio, the time for quick, executive action was needed. Now, a year later, the justification for unilateral, unaccountable, governor authority is no longer valid. Local level government leaders, state legislators, and the public should have explicit roles to fill to keep this governor and any future executive in check. HB 90, in addition to a personal recommendation of adding County Commissioners to oversee local health boards and mandating strict sunset provisions on executive authority, are excellent actions to take in ensuring not only oversight and accountability in this crisis, but in potential future instances where the allure of excessive government action is all too easy to accomplish.

Sincerely,

David Thomas
Ashtabula County Auditor
(440) 812-9022

djthomas@ashtabulacounty.us