

# Williams County Health District

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**May 9, 2022**

Dear State and Local Government Committee,

I write today on behalf of the Williams County Combined Board of Health, a nine-member board of health elected by geographically located jurisdictions representing all areas of the county. House Bill 463 seeks to remove the local elected officials from oversight for appointing members to represent their areas of the community and place this role to a much smaller subset, namely three elected officials. One of the keys of a health department is a close relationship with local community elected officials namely villages, cities, township trustees and county commissioners through the District Advisory Council. On a regular basis, townships and municipalities contact the board to work cooperatively with them to solve issues in their immediate community. These interactions range from nuisance issues to unsanitary restaurant conditions. In the case of roughly 50% of the health districts, the health departments are funded directly by these entities. These jurisdictions can withhold and have withheld funding if they are not pleased with the operation of the health department.

In the case of the others not funded by the District Advisory Council, funding is decided directly by the voters through levy funding. It is the voter's choice to fund their health department.

This bill misses the point of those who really decide public health issues in Ohio since local health departments implement what has passed the legislature as laws. The vast majority of what a health department does is not decided locally. Major activities of a board of health are the regulation of food services operations, inspecting septic systems, construction of water systems. Services provided include registering and issuing birth and death records that are regulated by state law. Providing grant funded services such as WIC, car seat safety programs, and maternal and child health programs also falls under the health department. All these grant funded programs have state oversight.

At the board of health level, the board's main functions include hearing licensing actions regarding food service operations and hearing variance requests to state laws much like a zoning board.

In Williams County, we have a strong relationship with our county commissioners and are in contact frequently on issues of concern. We value their input and believe that the current appointment of the board reflects the diverse views and input of the community. While all laws need to be reevaluated and improvements made, we believe that by working with the bill's sponsor, we can come to a good solution to any concerns.

Respectively submitted,

James D. Watkins MPH, REHS

Williams County Health Commissioner