



MORROW COUNTY HEALTH DISTRICT

Stephanie Bragg, RN, BSN, MHA, Health Commissioner
619 W. Marion Rd., Suite B, Rm. 143, Mt. Gilead, OH 43338
Phone: (419) 947-1545 | Fax: (419) 946-6807
www.morrowcountyhealth.org

House State and Local Government Committee
77 South High Street, 13th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee:

I am writing today to express my concerns regarding House Bill 463 and the elimination of the county District Advisory Council. I believe that the majority of county District Advisory Councils work well in serving their purpose of appointing members of the Board of Health and representing their constituents' public health needs and concerns. Although there may be issues with how a particular District Advisory Council exercises their authority, I do not believe that the answer is to strip the council of its duties. In these instances, I feel that with proper education and clarification of the District Advisory Council's duties and authority any issues can be corrected.

It is my belief that public health should be conducted as politically neutral as possible. As the situation stands currently, the District Advisory Council is comprised of 23 representatives of each political subdivision within my county. Having the District Advisory Council in place to represent the entirety of the county's residents, regardless of political affiliation, allows for this neutrality. The County Commissioners in my county are a three-member group that do not necessarily represent the entirety of the county's residents. If the District Advisory Council's duties were to be assigned to the County Commissioners, I fear that the neutrality would become obsolete.

Additionally, as a regulatory agency for food safety, household sewage management, and other issues of public health concern, public health agencies must be able to conduct enforcement activities in a manner that is equal, regardless of a person's public office. Because the County Commissioners do not currently appoint Board of Health members or oversee the Local Health District, we are able to apply the rules equally without fear of potential conflict or reprisal, even when the enforcement affects a County Commissioner's home or business. For example, in my county our agency issues the food licensure and conduct food safety inspections for all food service establishments. In the past, we have had the situation where a County Commissioner owned multiple food business establishments. If the County Commissioners are granted the authority to appoint the Board of Health, there is a real risk that issues could arise if unfavorable regulatory action would need to take place against a County Commissioner.

In conclusion, while there may be issues or concerns regarding the manner in which some county District Advisory Councils conduct their business and exert their authority, I do not believe that this is the case for the majority of counties. Having a District Advisory Council allows for better representation of community members in regard to public health concerns, and helps to provide a more politically neutral environment for which the local health districts may conduct our work.

Thank you for your consideration,

Stephanie Bragg, RN, BSN, MHA
Health Commissioner
Morrow County Health District