

Williams County Health District

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February 8, 2021

Dear Senator, Roegner:

On behalf of Williams County Health District, I write to ask that this message be submitted to the Senate Government Reform and Oversight Committee in opposition to Senate Bill 22.

The bill as introduced would severely restrict the authority of the Director of Health to respond in a timely and efficient way to outbreaks of communicable disease and public health emergencies that threaten the health and safety of Ohioans.

As the public health system, both state and local, works diligently with all partners to make our way out of this once-in-a-century pandemic, the effort has and will continue to be an "all hands on deck" situation. Now is not the time to strip the state health director of any authority that might be necessary to limit the spread of this virus that has resulted in the death of over 11,000 Ohioans to date. Now is the time to focus on Ohio's mass vaccination efforts, described by most experts as the most significant logistical challenge ever known.

This bill will also impact the Director's authority in times beyond the declaration of a public health emergency, such as communicable disease outbreaks that impact multiple long-term care facilities, a recent foodborne outbreak that originated in a meat packaging plant where product was shipped to many locations statewide.

Please do not pass a bill that will tie up the Director's authority in a cumbersome legislative process that includes an oversight committee and concurrent resolutions by both chambers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James D. Watkins", is written over a horizontal line.

James D. Watkins MPH RS
Health Commissioner

JDW:sls