

# WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 2/8/2021

Name: Erik Balster, MPH, REHS, RS

Are you representing: Yourself  Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Preble County General Health District

Position/Title: Health Commissioner

Address: 615 Hillcrest Drive

City: Eaton State: Ohio Zip: 45320

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Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes  No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): Senate Bill 22

Specific Issue: Director of Health order and emergency authority

Are you testifying as a: Proponent  Opponent  Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes  No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? 3 minutes

Please provide a brief statement on your position:

I am opposed to this bill because it would not allow the Director of Health to act swiftly and efficiently to threats to the public health and safety of Ohioans.

*Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.*



February 8, 2021

Dear Senator Roegner:

On behalf of Preble County General 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 add more red tape and restrict the ability of the Director of Health to prevent and/or respond in a timely and efficient way to future outbreaks of communicable disease and public health emergencies that threaten the health and safety of Ohioans.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major burden on all Ohioans, affecting both the wellbeing of our economy and our health, it is a once-in-a-century pandemic. Now is not the time to strip the state health director of any authority that might be necessary now or in the future to quickly limit the spread of a highly pathogenic virus like we saw with the Ebola outbreak in 2014 or the 2009 H1N1 Pandemic. Rather, it is important to now look at the mass vaccination effort taking place in Ohio that is leading us out of this pandemic and back to normal life.

One final concern regarding this bill is that it will also impact the Director's authority in times beyond the declaration of a public health emergency. Some of these more regular, but often out of sight and out of mind issues Ohioans face include foodborne disease outbreaks, whooping cough in schools, legionnaire's outbreaks in retirement homes, and the more recent Hepatitis A outbreak associated with the opioid epidemic. These situations, if left unchecked or on hold, can quickly spiral out of control.

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,

**Erik Balster, MPH, REHS, RS**

*Health Commissioner*

Preble County Public Health

