

As introduced, SB 22 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. A move that would be akin to taking a water hose from a fireman at a house fire. Not only does it distract from the current efforts, it undermines the ability of public health to address more routine threats and opens the door for far reaching, unintended consequences.

Though case counts are moving in an encouraging direction, the pandemic is not over. Taking such stark action at this time is not prudent given the threats that remain. It is reasonable for the legislature to begin a deliberative process to consider measures to build a sensible, sustainable approach that balances the role of the legislature and the executive in times of crisis. However, Senate Bill 22 is not that vehicle.

The time after a crisis passes always presents an opportunity for reflection and improvement. This is a critical aspect of all emergency response and one that public health engages in frequently. The goal of such activities is to build upon and strengthen what worked while simultaneously identifying needed improvements in preparation for the next crisis.

The pandemic has highlighted strengths and weaknesses in our public health infrastructure. It will be critical, when the crisis has passed, for the legislature to be involved in a deliberate review of all systems to ensure Ohioans are better protected in the next crisis.

I encourage the legislature to take the time to engage stakeholders in a thorough review before taking further action.

Sincerely,

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