



City of New Philadelphia

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TESTIMONY TO THE OHIO SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEE

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and esteemed members of the Senate Health Committee.

My name is Marvin Fete, and I am the elected Law Director for the City of New Philadelphia, Ohio. My purpose in addressing this body today is to ask that you oppose any changes that would affect local city health districts and specifically request Sec. 3709.02 be stricken entirely from H.B. 110.

I know members of this body value the importance of Municipal Home Rule as enshrined in Section 3 of Article XVIII of the Ohio Constitution. Sec. 3709.02 of H.B. 110 is a direct threat to Municipal Home Rule which could lead to the abolishment of our local health department, something that would be catastrophic to the health, safety, and welfare of the citizens I represent.

I want to tell you what life in my area would have been like over this past year were there no New Philadelphia Health Department.

When the Governor issued his shut down order last year, the County Health Director sent letters to all businesses in the County outside of New Philadelphia, demanding they prove why they were an essential business. The New Philadelphia Health Department took the opposite approach. Instead of shutting down businesses, the Health Commissioner of the New Philadelphia Health Department worked tirelessly with other city officials including myself, to develop written protocols to keep people working in a safe manner. Together we established health order guidelines that allowed car dealers, lawn care providers, rental companies and many others to stay in business.

As this body knows, maintaining people's health is also about being able to work, put food on the table, and take care of your family. While the County Health Department was shutting businesses down, New Philadelphia kept people working. Through the efforts of our local Health Department, businesses were able to stay open and continue to operate in a safe manner and, as a result, people did not lose their income, jobs, or businesses. The loss of a livelihood not only affects bank accounts, but affects mental health, which in turn affects physical health.

When the Governor ordered the closure of all gyms across the state, the County Health Department enforced the closure of every stadium and park facility in the County. Again, the New Philadelphia Health Department took the opposite approach. Because we have our own local Health Department, our 23 acre Tuscora Park and City owned Woody Hayes Quaker Stadium, which has an all-weather track that we open to the citizens for exercise, remained open when every other such facility in the County was closed. People not just from New Philadelphia, but from the entire County flocked to our local stadium to exercise because everything else was closed. Without the efforts of our New Philadelphia Health Department, the stadium and park would have been closed for many months, leaving residents with no way to exercise and stay healthy. I cannot think of anything more important than physical health during a global pandemic. When you take away people's ability to work and stay physically active, many turn instead to substance abuse.

As Law Director, I am the chief prosecutor for the City of New Philadelphia and 13 surrounding townships. My office prosecutes over a 1,000 criminal cases each year, which is over twice as many as the county prosecutor's office handles, and many of these involve drug abuse cases. According to countyhealthrankings.org, Tuscarawas County ranks 18th in the State in drug overdose mortality rate with 49 deaths from 2017-2019, and these numbers have only risen during the pandemic.

Our local Health Department is essential in assisting residents with substance abuse issues. The Health Commissioner of the New Philadelphia Health Department is a member of the New Philadelphia Recovery Court Team and assists participants in Recovery Court in obtaining medication assisted treatment to address substance abuse issues. The Health Department also assists recovery court participants in addressing any medical issues they may have. The Health Department administers Vivitrol and other necessary medications to assist those in recovery. These services are offered to all residents, not just recovery court participants. This service is NOT offered by the County Health Department.

Without our local Health Department, many would not receive the treatment they need in order to stay in recovery, and very likely the number of overdose deaths would be higher. If you take away the New Philadelphia Health Department, you take away one of the very few tools I have in my arsenal as city prosecutor to combat the terrible scourge of opiates that have infected our community which is taking the lives of our citizens and destroying families.

Without a local health department, New Philadelphia, and indeed our entire county would have suffered even more during this global pandemic. More people would have been out of work, people would not have been able to exercise and stay healthy, and the only health department that treats drug addiction in the entire county would not have been there during a time when drug abuse saw a significant increase in area already hit hard by the opioid epidemic. Taking away the New Philadelphia Health Department would not only be a violation of our Home Rule authority, it would literally threaten the lives of thousands of Ohio citizens.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask that this honorable body oppose any changes that would affect local city health districts and specifically request Sec. 3709.02 be stricken entirely from H.B. 110.