



Proponent Testimony of the Jefferson Health Plan to the Senate Government Oversight Committee in Favor of the enactment of O.R.C. §121.221 as included in House Bill 257 (2023)

June 26, 2024

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of H.B. 257 sponsored by Representative Hoops and Representative Claggett. H.B. 257 was passed by the Ohio House of Representatives on November 29, 2023.

The Jefferson Health Plan is a regional council of governments headquartered in Steubenville, Ohio, which was established in 1985 for the purpose of providing a jointly self-insured health benefit consortium for its political subdivision members. The Jefferson Health Plan's membership is comprised of public entities such as school districts, municipalities, county governments, community colleges, educational service centers, port authorities, and other types of local governments. As a regional council of governments, the Jefferson Health Plan is a public body that adheres to the Ohio Open Meetings Act (O.R.C. §121.22).

In the 2015 State of Ohio Operating Budget (House Bill 64), the Ohio legislature passed legislation that allowed the Jefferson Health Plan to add members from other states to the consortium. Since the enactment of that legislation, the Jefferson Health Plan expanded by adding member political subdivisions in Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee, and Virginia. It also has received regulatory approval to operate in Kentucky and West Virginia. Currently, the Jefferson Health Plan is comprised of more than 200 political subdivisions and covers nearly 100,000 individuals.

Under the Jefferson Health Plan's membership agreement, Ohio's regional council of governments law, and the corresponding laws of the other states in which the Jefferson Health Plan operates, the political subdivision members collectively participate in the consortium's governance. The Jefferson Health Plan's organizational documents require the consortium to hold multiple meetings each year to keep its members, and the Jefferson Health Plan's Board of Directors, updated on the consortium's finances and to vote on operational matters. Since the Jefferson Health Plan is a public entity that follows Ohio's Open Meetings Act, existing law requires the consortium's membership and Board of Director meetings to be held in-person.

Member representatives designated to attend meetings of the Jefferson Health Plan typically include school district superintendents, treasurers, city managers, fiscal officers, county administrators, or other chief executives who have full-time positions managing their respective political subdivision. With the Jefferson Health Plan expanding into a multi-state consortium, this has resulted in greater savings, efficiency, and financial security for the health benefits the members offer to their employees. Many members are now multiple hours away from Ohio

requiring significant travel commitments for the designated representatives to attend and participate in a meeting. The rigid in-person meeting requirement in Ohio's Open Meetings Act is inordinately burdensome for many of the Jefferson Health Plan's members to send representatives to attend the consortium's in-person meetings.

Additionally, to meet the requirements of Ohio's Open Meetings Act, the Jefferson Health Plan typically incurs significant expenses for centralized meeting space, meals, lodging, and travel expenses for its Board of Directors and staff to attend in-person meetings. Similarly, the member representatives who attend the consortium's membership meetings incur travel expenses for their employers. Allowing the Jefferson Health Plan to hold meetings virtually would create additional savings that could be re-allocated for use toward the programs and expenses the Jefferson Health Plan provides to its members.

For greater efficiency in the governance and operation of its multi-state consortium, it is necessary for the Jefferson Health Plan to be provided authority to conduct its meetings through teleconference, internet video conference, or other similar electronic technology where member representatives are permitted to attend, participate, and vote remotely. If H.B. 257 is enacted, the Jefferson Health Plan will ensure that the tenets of Ohio's Open Meetings Act continue to be followed by allowing for the consortium's public meetings to remain available and accessible to the public.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the proposed amendment. The Jefferson Health Plan requests your support for, and the committee's approval of, H.B. 257 which would allow the Jefferson Health Plan to hold routine meetings remotely under the Ohio Open Meetings Act.