

Opponent Testimony on Senate Bill 255
Presented by Dr. Amanda K. Fisher, DC
Before the Ohio Senate Health Committee
November 20, 2024

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 255, which seeks to amend Ohio Revised Code 313.02 to restrict eligibility for the office of county coroner exclusively to MD or DO physicians. This change would significantly narrow the pool of qualified candidates for this critical role, worsening Ohio's ongoing "coroner crisis" while undermining the democratic right of voters to choose the candidate they believe best represents them.

My name is Dr. Amanda K. Fisher, and I am proud to serve as the elected coroner for Belmont County. I hold a Bachelor of Science degree in Life Science with a concentration in Molecular Biology from Otterbein University and a Doctorate of Chiropractic from Northeast College of Health Sciences. My internship at the National Naval Medical Center, now known as Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, deepened my interest in anatomy and pathology, ultimately inspiring my commitment to public service in the role of coroner.

In 2020, I was elected as Belmont County Coroner after a competitive race against the incumbent coroner of 16 years and an anesthesiologist. Having opposition again in the 2024 general election, I was re-elected by an overwhelming majority against my opponent. My elections demonstrate the trust voters have placed in my ability to fulfill this role, based on my background, qualifications, and track record.

The Shortage of Coroners in Ohio

Ohio is experiencing a well-documented shortage of candidates for the office of coroner. At the May 2024 Ohio State Coroner's Association Annual Education Conference, data showed that 17 out of Ohio's 88 counties had no candidates run for the position during the current term (2021–2024). This shortage is expected to worsen as fewer MDs and DOs are willing or able to pursue these roles, particularly in rural and underserved counties.

In 2016, the Ohio General Assembly passed Substitute House Bill 240, which recognized the growing shortage of qualified candidates for coroner positions. David Corey, Executive Director of the Ohio State Coroner's Association, testified at the time:

"We believe there will be a serious shortage of quality candidates to run for local office."

Despite recognizing this problem eight years ago, Senate Bill 255 now seeks to move in the opposite direction, further restricting the pool of eligible candidates and creating even greater challenges for counties already struggling to fill this role.

Currently, only four states, including Ohio, require coroners to be a licensed physician. Most states impose no such restrictions and operate effective systems for death investigation.

Narrowing eligibility to only MDs and DOs would disproportionately impact smaller counties like mine, where recruitment challenges are already pronounced. Instead of limiting choices, Ohio should focus on

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expanding the pool of qualified candidates to ensure that every county has access to effective leadership in the coroner's office.

Respecting Voter Choice

The office of coroner is an elected position for a reason: it allows voters to determine who is best suited to serve their community. My elections in 2020 and 2024 exemplify how this process works. In both races, voters were presented with a diverse pool of candidates, including MDs, DOs, and myself, a chiropractic physician. They assessed our qualifications, experience, and commitment to public service, and they chose me.

This bill undermines the judgment of voters, implying that their ability to evaluate candidates is insufficient. It places unnecessary restrictions on their choices and disregards the fact that elections are the most direct form of accountability. The citizens of Belmont County have twice demonstrated their trust in me to serve as coroner, and I have fulfilled that trust by working diligently and collaboratively with forensic pathologists, law enforcement, and other professionals to ensure thorough and accurate death investigations.

Ohio voters, like the citizens of Belmont County, deserve to have a full range of qualified candidates to choose from, regardless of specific licensure. Limiting their options only serves to disenfranchise them and diminish the democratic process.

Conclusion

Senate Bill 255 would exacerbate Ohio's ongoing shortage of candidates for coroner while stripping voters of their right to choose the candidate they believe is best qualified for this role. It is a solution in search of a problem and creates new barriers where flexibility is most needed.

I respectfully request that this committee oppose SB 255 and preserve both the integrity of Ohio's elections and the functionality of its coroner system. Let voters continue to make these critical decisions, and let us work together to address the "coroner crisis" in ways that expand, rather than restrict, the pool of qualified candidates.

Thank you for your time and attention. I welcome any questions the committee may have.

Sincerely,
Dr. Amanda K. Fisher, DC
Belmont County Coroner