

I respectfully submit the following testimony for the hearing on SB 311.

I am Dr. Johnathon Ross. I have practiced and taught primary care Internal Medicine in the state of Ohio since 1980. I was born in Lorain, Ohio and received my BA degree from Cornell University, my Medical Doctorate from the Medical College of Ohio (now the University of Toledo) and my Masters degree in Public Health in health policy and administration from the University of Michigan. I am a past member of the Ohio State Medical Board and since my retirement from clinical and educational practice, I have been a member of the Toledo Lucas County Health District board and have been the president of that Board since the beginning of the Covid19 pandemic in Ohio. I wish to recommend caution on the proposed language in the current version of SB 311.

Covid19 has proven to those of us in public health why we need the State Health Department and Governor to have special rapid response powers in the face of a public health emergency. First, consider the emergency response to the first wave of this pandemic. At that point, we did not have any idea how to treat Covid19 and we had no vaccination available. Had the Governor not intervened with a shutdown order we would have undoubtedly overwhelmed our medical resources here in Ohio as we saw in New York City and other areas of the country where the first wave was severe. Our ability to slow this pandemic down has now allowed us to have time to launch a tremendous scientific research effort. During the time that shutdown bought, we have come to understand who is at risk and what the behaviors increase risk and to find prove what public health actions and medical treatments reduce the spread and death rate of those infected.

Now, it appears we are on the verge of another even more severe wave or transmission of Covid19. This is happening just as we may soon have available vaccines that may help to suppress the pandemic. Public health officials are preparing for a mass vaccination campaign that will likely suppress this terrible disease but it will take time and the virus will not give us that time. Lives are at stake while we wait for the science to assure us that these vaccines are safe and effective. It will take us months to get shots into arms.

If we allow the pandemic to rage while we wait for vaccine safety and effectiveness to be proven and safe vaccines to be given, thousands more will die who do not need to die if we take the isolation and quarantine efforts that we must to control the disease while we buy time. If we do not buy time, we will likely overwhelm our medical resources again and likely kill many more of our heroic first responders and health care providers, who like soldiers in a war, have been on the front lines and literally risking their lives daily for almost a year to save the lives of our friends, our neighbors and our families.

The speed with which the public health orders must be enacted to control this type of pandemic cannot be underestimated. Many who are infected have no symptoms early in this illness and are spreading disease without being aware they are doing so. Cases are doubling weekly and deaths will too despite new effective but very expensive treatments that often involve hospitalization and intensive care. Restrictions on our behavior and commerce are needed to give us the time to complete a vaccination campaign. Please do not hamstring the public health and medical scientists who are advising the health department and Governor while weighing the economic, medical and psychological costs of further shutdown and isolation orders in the face of this

horrific pandemic. Those of us in public health understand your concerns but you must trust us to have the best interests of all Ohioans at heart.

If you wish to implement a review process every time the Governor implements general isolation or quarantine orders that is understandable. Ask the Governor and Health Department experts to come before the legislature and justify the orders they have implemented but do it after the fact so as not to delay. We have already seen that even one week of delay on shutdown can double the number of cases and deaths with this pandemic. Diseases like Covid19 will not wait and will kill and harm if we deliberate without action based on our best medical and public health science.

Sincerely,

Johnathon S. Ross MD, MPH  
President of the Board of the Toledo Lucas County Health District  
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