



House State and Local Government Committee  
November 19, 2020  
Opponent Testimony – SB 311 – Submitted by:

*Franklin County Board of Commissioners*  
John O'Grady, President  
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*Franklin County Public Health*  
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Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, thank you for the opportunity for the Franklin County Board of Commissioners and Franklin County Public Health to submit written testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 311.

Thank you also for your work on behalf of all Ohioans as we collectively face the unprecedented health and economic challenges arising from the coronavirus pandemic. These are indeed among the most acutely difficult times in recent memory, and we are working tirelessly as your local partners to do our part to address the needs of residents and businesses during this time.

We are deeply concerned that Senate Bill 311 proposes changes that will have broad reaching implications for our state health department and local public health boards' ability to coordinate investigation and management authority regarding communicable disease outbreaks and inserts a political process in the protection of public health.

There are many things we have yet to learn about the COVID-19 virus, but two significant and undisputed learnings have been that someone can have it and show no symptoms, and that it is highly contagious. There is also a varying time lag between exposure and one's exhibiting symptoms, if not asymptomatic, so limiting health orders to those who have been exposed or diagnosed--both varying, individualized and quickly changing conditions--is neither practical nor will it be effective in stopping the spread of disease. Prevention, slowing the spread of dangerous disease, and protecting the vulnerable should be chief concerns of any public health policy, and SB 311 proposes to significantly undermine the state's ability to do so in a coordinated and comprehensive way.

Nearly 6,000 Ohioans have died from COVID-19 to date, and nearly 290,000 Ohioans have been diagnosed with the virus. In Franklin County, we have had over 13,000 cases and nearly 200 deaths. We know many of these individuals contracted the virus unknowingly, from people who were exposed but not yet showing symptoms at backyard get-togethers or family events, or who had not yet been diagnosed. Health orders applying to only those who have known exposure or are confirmed positive will do little to get ahead of an infectious disease, and the nature of COVID-19 is quite illustrative of this point.

Thank you again for considering this testimony, and we respectfully ask that you reject these proposed constraints on the Ohio Department of Health and our collective ability to respond to public health emergencies in our state.