



*Office of the President*

November 18, 2020

Dear House State and Local Government Committee Chairman Scott Wiggam:

Thank you for the funding and support for Ohioans that you have authorized through legislation and the Controlling Board for public health officials, businesses, and nonprofits. As state legislators, your role in the COVID-19 pandemic response has been critical.

As you finish the 133<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, I encourage you to support public health and to oppose Senate Bill 311.

During the pandemic, multiple bills have been introduced that would hamstring the ability of public officials to respond to the pandemic. Most recently, Senate Bill 311 has been fast-tracked through this committee. I join others in opposing this bill because a pandemic is not the time to modify public health laws. Ohio is in crisis. The entire world is grappling with this novel coronavirus. Public health officials need all the tools available to them to limit the spread. This is critical to businesses, colleges and schools remaining open and to alleviating the strain on medical resources and health professionals. As pandemic conditions continue changing, the Governor and public health officials need the ability to address what they are seeing in real-time. Further, the Governor and public health officials must have the ability to protect Ohioans and our economy, notwithstanding any response at the federal level.

We have learned during the past several months that the success of our schools and economy depend on how well we manage the virus. Without a strong public health response, we know that cases will continue to rise exponentially, at a high cost to the health and well-being of our people and the economy of our state. We want to ensure that Ohioans feel safe attending college, sending their children to school, shopping in local businesses, eating in or carrying out food from local restaurants and living their lives. To achieve this goal, the legislature can help their communities by promoting public health with additional support and resources.

Ohio's public health system is more than 100 years old and has served Ohioans well, by ensuring clean water, food safety, and protecting the most vulnerable. Today, public health is actively responding to the COVID-19 crisis. We need Ohio's system to remain strong as we move into the next phase of the response. There will be a time when the public health system and the response to the pandemic will be reviewed, assessed, and modernized based on the lessons being learned now. This is not that time.

We appreciate the challenge you face serving your constituents during this pandemic. We pledge to continue working with you to ensure Ohio maintains a strong and effective public health system that has the best and most appropriate tools to combat infectious diseases. We must work together through this unprecedented time to keep all Ohio citizens, employers and communities healthy and strong. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Para M. Jones, Ph.D.  
President