

Testimony Supporting House Bill 55
House Government Oversight Committee
Submitted by:
Andrea R. Yagoda

Chair Wilkin, Vice Chair, White, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for affording me the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 55. I am a private citizen and a resident of Ohio for the last 46 years. Over the years I have appeared to testify in person and have submitted written testimony on bills I care about. For me, it is a way to make my voice heard. Having never received any acknowledgement from either my state senator or representative when I contact their offices either in writing or via phone that they hear me, the hearing process has significant meaning for me. I would not doubt if many Ohioans feel the same way.

Further, I oftentimes find myself wondering whether written testimony is read by anyone on the committee. Last week I watched the hearing on HB89. After the oral testimony the chairman advised the committee that written testimony was uploaded to their ipads. Immediately thereafter, a motion was made and the matter was put to a vote. Hardly enough time to read the written testimonies.

Personally appearing during the pandemic has been very stressful. I worry about getting infected. I worry about the safety guidelines put in place. In December, 2020 I arranged to testify personally on three (3) bills. Before I left home in Delaware County, a 45 minute drive I checked the calendar. However, by the time I reached the hearing room, the hearing had been canceled. It was canceled while I was on the way down. I observed legislators walking around without masks as well as spectators, those appearing to testify without masks. So the next time I prepared to attend a hearing I wore two (2) masks , six

(6) layers of cloth plus a filter. I arrived a half hour before the time each hearing was to commence. However, each hearing (these were on different days) had been scheduled on the heels of a house and a senate session. These sessions included what I would call “retirement parties” for those outgoing from the house and senate. There was music, awards, roasts, etc. All while constituents were waiting to testify at these public hearings. I waited over three hours past the scheduled hearing time for each hearing to commence. On the Senate side, the hearing room was packed, individuals were not abiding by the seating separation as there was not enough room. At about one half hour before the senate committee hearing actually commenced a group, tired of waiting left. During each of these three (3) hour waits I was worried about my health and welfare. Many people were not masked, many people were not socially distanced and it was difficult, at times, to maintain the distance. I did not want to leave the area not knowing when the hearing would commence.

When I got home I found myself consciously checking if I had taste and smell and taking my temperature for a few days as I had been at the statehouse for so long. I am 68 and my husband 76. For safety I maintained distance from my husband for a few days to ensure if I had contracted something I would not pass it on. You may not have the same concerns as I do regarding the virus but you should at the very least respect my concerns. Constituents should not have to endanger their health to make their voices heard. This should not be a choice one is forced to make.

HB55 provides for remote testimony during a health crisis as we are experiencing right now. Many state agencies are conducting business and hearings remotely and there

is no justification that the statehouse cannot do the same. I therefore ask this committee to vote for HB55.

Thank you.

Andrea R. Yagoda