



City of New Philadelphia, Ohio
New Philadelphia Health District

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HB110 – SENATE TESTIMONY

New Philadelphia City Health District
Nichole Bache, BSN, RN, Director of Nursing

Senator Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee.:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Senate Finance Committee about the unintended negative impacts that HB 110 will have on city and county residents that access services through the New Philadelphia City Health Department. My name is Nichole Bache and I have been the Director of Nursing for the New Philadelphia Health District for the past 14 years.

During my career at the New Philadelphia City Health Department, I have witnessed many changes in public health. Two of the greatest challenges that we have faced are the COVID-19 pandemic and response and the overwhelming wave of opioid and addiction issues. I would like to take a few moments of your time to share how our small department has tackled these issues head on while also continuing the daily tasks of operating a health department and meeting the standards to be recognized as an accredited health district.

From the beginning of the pandemic until now, the New Philadelphia City Health Department has investigated 1,566 cases of COVID-19. While many other health departments across the state also handled high numbers of people ill with COVID, New Philadelphia City Health Department went above and beyond to ensure that our residents were safe and cared for. Nursing staff at our department reached out to each positive COVID case by telephone to offer education and do the necessary investigation interview. After initial telephone contact, every positive case up through November 2020, received a home visit. Our staff donned an N-95 mask and proper PPE and made it a point to deliver each resident a letter of quarantine or isolation to their home. These visits not only helped to bring calmness and peace to our ill residents, but it allowed our department to have eyes on the ground and circumvent situations before they became overwhelming problems. Please remember that during these early months, schools and churches were closed, physician and counselling offices along with probation and social services had all gone virtual. Our most at risk community members were quietly falling through the cracks.

One home that I personally visited has had a profound and lasting impact on my life. I was notified of a man who was positive for COVID-19 and hospitalized. He was rather ill so I collected initial information from his nurse. I was made aware that his family included a wife and 5 children and I was unable to reach his wife via telephone. I drove across town to a modest home and donned my PPE to attempt to make contact with the wife and discuss quarantining the family. A young child greeted me at the door and the mother called for me to come in. The young woman I encountered was scared, she had



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dropped her husband off at the ER 2 days before and through tears she told me a brief history of the illness her husband had experienced. While discussing quarantine and daily temperature checks I noticed that the mother wasn't feeling well so I asked about her and if she had any symptoms, I took her temperature and found that she had a fever. One of the children, around age 6 asked me why her food tasted funny when she ate. I looked at the 5 children standing in the kitchen and simply asked "who can't taste or smell anything?"- 3 out of five chubby little hands raised in the air.

While interviewing all family members to see when symptoms started and to rework quarantine days. I looked around the tiny kitchen, many of the cabinets had no doors on them and realized that I didn't notice much food- the shelves were bare. I also found while talking to the children that they hadn't been able to keep up with their school work, they only had one device at home and little to no internet access. While talking with the mother I found that they owned a small business that was their sole income and when her husband became ill, they had to close the business. I headed back to the office from this home visit with a heavy heart that day. Upon arrival back at the Health Department and telling my staff of my experience they opened their wallets to put money in a fund to help families in need during the pandemic. I was able to take some of that money and buy groceries to fill the stomachs of that family we had just quarantined. I called the school and set up delivery of loaner chrome books so that they could keep up on school work and added the family to the school's food delivery list.

Home visits like this one proved invaluable to our citizens, to expose problems that would have otherwise gone unnoticed during the height of the pandemic. Our department became the first line of protection in our community, isolating those that were ill, quarantining those who were exposed, delivering thermometers for symptom monitoring, bringing groceries and diapers to families that were being asked to not leave their home for 2 weeks. All of these services were provided while balancing all of the other services that are vital to a fully functioning health department.

As I stated earlier our Health Department never closed to normal services during the pandemic. Our staff worked harder than ever to ensure that our community continued to have access to the services that they have come to rely upon our health department to provide. One of these vital services is our medication assisted treatment program (MAT), for individuals who are addicted to opiates and alcohol. Please realize that our County Health Department has closed its Alcohol and Addiction Program as of September 2019, and merger of our department with the County Health Department would further cause undue barriers in our community for treatment.

Our health department was one of the first health departments in the state to set up a MAT program. Our Municipal Court approached our department to set up a partnership with them to establish an Ohio Supreme Court Certified Recovery Court. Municipal Court needed a MAT provider and Judge Nanette Von Allman told Health Commissioner



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Ionno and me that every other provider in our county that she approached had turned her down. I must admit we were reluctant to step into the world of addiction as well, but after some initial investigation, I cannot imagine our department not being involved.

As part of my involvement in the recovery community in our county, we are on the Municipal Recovery Court Treatment Team, a member of the Tuscarawas County Addiction Task Force, we have representation on the Tuscarawas County Community Corrections Board and the Tuscarawas County Anti-Drug Coalition. In addition, we have administered 1,161 doses of Vivitrol through our partnership with the Tuscarawas County ADAMHS Board and had many success stories complete 24 months of treatment. This program is vitally important to our community as our county has seen 126 Overdoses from October 2020 to March 2021, 52 of those overdoses were in the city of New Philadelphia. As I am sure you are all well aware, addiction and mental health need more access to care not barriers and roadblocks.

To this end I will respectfully request that the language in House Bill 110 requiring health departments in cities under 50,000 undergo a feasibility study and possible forced merger be changed for Health Departments that are Nationally Accredited or in process of Accreditation.