

Testimony of Nadera Lopez-Garrity
Proponent Senate Bill 22
Government Oversight and Reform Committee
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Madame Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig and honorable members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 22, a common-sense legislation that would procure the checks and balances that our constitutional federal republic prides itself in upholding, yet has been woefully and shamelessly disregarded for almost a year.

Witnessing the executive decisions being made that have adversely impacted the lives of millions of Ohioans devoid of the input from the General Assembly as elected by the people to represent the people, has been alarming, to say the least, for an immigrant like me to witness as a proud U.S. citizen whose roots stem from a once thriving nation that was destroyed by tyrannical leaders who disregarded the checks and balances upon which my birth country of Venezuela was founded upon. We cannot continue to let such usurpation of power take hold at a State level, lest we risk losing more as precious lives, all of which are essential, continue to fall victim to deaths of despairs, abuse, neglect, starvation and addiction whilst being led into an economic suicide of catastrophic proportions, initiated by decisions made by a handful of individuals who relied on a woefully erroneous model and skewed data.

By this point we should all be aware of the fact that unemployment has very deleterious effects on public health. A meta-analysis of 42 scientific peer reviewed studies conducted in 15 countries on the relationship between unemployment and all-cause mortality found that unemployment increased the risk of dying by 63% and we are witnessing it in Ohio.

Since the orders were imposed on Ohioans last winter, the unemployment rate in Ohio peaked at 17.6%, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, which equated to nearly 1 million Ohioans unemployed. At the peak of this shut down, the unemployment rate this year was 58.6% higher than the peak unemployment from the Great Recession.

Soaring suicides rates and drug overdoses resulting from the lockdown and increasing rates of unemployment is imminent with the declining mental health of our communities and neighbors. In one county alone, the number of overdose deaths increased by nearly 75%. More than 27% of those who died from an overdose this year were African American.

Many children and teenagers are also suffering missed milestones and lonely isolation during quarantine shutdowns that are detrimental to their overall wellbeing – leading to anxiety, depression and thoughts of suicide that impacts their mental health for years to come.

The Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry published a study conducted by a team of experts led by Dr. Maria Loades, clinical psychologist from the Department of Psychology at the University of Bath, which not only reported that “social isolation and loneliness increased the risk of depression, as well as the possibility of anxiety at the time of loneliness,” but found that “young people were as much as 3 times more likely to develop depression in the future due to social isolation, with the impact of loneliness on mental health lasting up to 9 years later.”

To top it off, according to a report by ABC 9 of Cincinnati, “Local divorce attorneys are overwhelmed with families in chaos; domestic violence petitions in Hamilton County are on target to hit the second-highest number in a decade, and local child protection workers are reporting more severe physical abuse this year, especially of very young children.” Those concerning revelations are not isolated incidents as reported by other counties.

Additionally, a local frontline doctor, who has treated several dozens of COVID-19 patients, echoed the same aforementioned concerns and revealed some more disturbing implications as a result of the orders dictated by the governor and Ohio Department of Health, stating that:

“Mental health problems have been through the roof. Suicidal patient visits up drastically. Typically, we see a general improvement in weight, blood pressure, blood sugar across the board with a few stragglers going the wrong way. Many of the patients who we have worked hard to control have now gone the other way. I have seen many teachers in the past few weeks who are on the verge of a breakdown from being thrown into online learning and such. I have seen approximately 20 children with rashes on their face from masks. One ended up in the hospital when the rash got infected and the patient became septic. Patients have expressed to me extreme anger when discussing the possibility of another lock down. I have been getting significant push back from different facilities due to mask exemptions I have written. An example was an individual who I wrote an exemption for who was supposed to have a cardiac stress test. The facility would not do the test unless the patient wore a mask. She said she had a mask exemption and they asked her why so that they could verify if it was legitimate. The patient couldn’t tell the cardiac facility (the reason as to why) so they wouldn’t do the test. Completely unacceptable that they would ask a patient this. Obviously, this drastically violates privacy laws; however, this is fairly common.”

I can personally attest to the fact and the countless ways in which the governor’s orders have truly neglected to take the vulnerable into consideration, not only those in long term care facilities that were prevented from receiving appropriate care at the various hospitals whose staff members were furloughed shortly after the initiation of the orders, but those of us who are unable to wear a mask due to medical reasons. We have been ostracized from society. Gaslighted. Treated as second class citizens, in some instances unable to vote or participate in society whilst shopping for basic necessities without being harassed and expected to risk our lives, while many hypocritically claim to care about the most vulnerable. Those of us needing medical care denied access to treatment, testing, diagnostics and care. Special needs children denied access to therapies (aside from IEP education), as well as adults. The list of atrocities committed against Ohioans at every level has been tragic and inhumane in many instances.

Sadly, we have yet to see the full extent of the impact of the orders executed by the governor and ODH. An alarming report was recently released by experts from Duke University, Harvard Medical School, and the Johns Hopkins University business school, revealing that “The economic effects of COVID-19 could prove deadlier than the disease itself.” The research “concludes that the total lives lost to the virus in the U.S. may ‘far exceed those immediately related to the acute COVID-19 critical illness...The recession caused by the pandemic can jeopardize population health for the next two decades.”

According to Fortune, “The authors wondered how unemployment affects mortality and life expectancy years later. Little research on that question existed, so they conducted their own analysis using 67 years of data about unemployment, life expectancy, and death rates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. They were able to separate the effects of the unprecedented 2020 unemployment spike from other factors that affect mortality and life expectancy.

Their main finding: Over the next 20 years, 1.37 million more people will die than would have died without the unemployment shock the pandemic caused, a number the researchers call ‘staggering.’ They

find also that ‘excess deaths will disproportionately affect African-Americans.’ The implied increases in deaths per 100,000 individuals over the next 20 years are 32.6 for African-Americans versus 24.6 for white Americans. In all, about 3.2% more people would die in the U.S. over that span than would have died without the spike in joblessness.”

We cannot allow a single branch of government to have unchecked powers that contribute to such catastrophic tragedies. Everyone’s wellbeing must be taken into consideration. If there is one thing that has been clear throughout this pandemic is that we all have already lost and suffered much. It is long overdue for the General Assembly to be afforded the opportunity to represent the voices of the people, as should have been the case all along. S.B. 22 is a commonsense legislation that merely attempts to preserve the checks and balances that this country was founded upon and our state desperately needs.

I kindly urge you to please vote YES on S.B. 22 and highly advise that you read, “The Great Barrington Declaration,” initiated and signed by more than 3,200 infectious disease epidemiologist and public health scientists, nearly 4,800 medical practitioners and over 73,100 experts who have grave concerns about the damaging physical and mental health impacts of the prevailing COVID-19 policies.” Focused approaches that could facilitate better policy-making decisions in the future are also recommended in the declaration.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Nadera

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