

Dear Chairman Roegner, Vice Chairman McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the State and Local Government Committee –

My name is Valerie Hunter, and I am a school librarian in the Lexington School District, Richland County. My husband, Mark, is a teacher in the Northmor School District, Morrow County. We are the parents of four honor roll children in the Lexington School District, two at the Junior High and two at the High School, participating in a total of 12 sports and a variety of other activities and clubs.

Our family's stories are among hundreds of thousands of similar ones throughout the state that the Governor seems to ignore in his quest towards the unattainable elimination of a virus that is currently only active in .868% of our state's population (a number based on thousands of inaccurate tests).

Today, I want to share the story of our 8th grade daughter, Natalie. She is a student who had only missed one day of school in the four years prior to Covid. She is a runner who motivated her siblings to consistently join her in daily ab workouts and weightlifting routines over the past 10.5 months, when she realized it could put her a step ahead of many other athletes who might not take the same initiative, she became determined to not let Covid take away her opportunity to repeat a state championship with her cross-country teammates this past fall. Her coaches will attest to the fact that she had become a different athlete, a mentally and physically stronger athlete, than she was a year ago. She is reserved, but passionate and strong willed. Athletics is one of the tools that has helped her deal with the anxiety she experienced when she was younger.

The Monday before Natalie and her team were to run in the 2020 State Cross Country meet, our local health department reported a positive test result from a classmate at her school. When she and 7 of her teammates were told they would be quarantined and unable to run, she reacted strongly, and rightfully so. No matter how many times I run that moment of getting the call from my daughter's principal, while I am in a classroom full of students, letting me know what has transpired...that moment of him saying that he can't leave my daughter alone, and my husband or I need to get to the school to pick her up right away, because she is talking about wanting to die...no matter how many times I run it through my head, even months later, my heart breaks into a thousand pieces all over again.

The following days were an emotional roller-coaster, where we felt unable to leave our daughter alone...yet that is exactly what we were being directed to do...to isolate our broken-hearted, devastated child...because of a virus that she had a fraction of a percent of catching. We were supposed to leave her home alone and go back to work? Leave her home alone while we went and cheered on her younger brother and his teammates as they competed in the state meet that she should have also been running in? And, then, imagine the emotion of walking through the gate at that state meet and seeing your beautiful, strong, amazing daughter's picture from the 2019 race, front and center on the meet program cover, as your reminder of what was taken from her.

In the weeks following this event, Natalie was determined to take on a brand new sport, in hopes of moving on. She joined the swim team, even though she missed the first week of practice while finishing her quarantine. Still, she was a fast learner, seeing her time drop in her events during the first few weeks of the very short season. But, as she embraced that hope and momentum, she was once again contact traced. When I broke the news to her, her statement was "I'm just going

to quit everything so they can't take anything else away from me". At the same time our district moved to remote learning from Thanksgiving through mid-January and it was like the rug being pulled out from under her again. The grades that she had just started to bring up after the first quarantine began to fall again and she struggled to keep up. I am thankful for her gracious teachers but disturbed by the impact that this has now had on nearly a full year of her education, as well as that of our other three children.

I hope this testimony will raise questions about the principle of going along with things that are costing so many students in our state too much. If our daughter, who has grown up in a stable home, filled with fun memories, conversation, faith, and teaching moments, has come to the point in this "unprecedented" situation that words like "I want to die" spill from her heart, (words that will never be erased from this mama's heart), what can we expect is going on in the hearts and minds of the students that don't have the blessing of the home life our daughter has. Why are we creating and/or allowing a situation where we are sacrificing the mental health and education of our students for a virus with a 99.6% survival rate? Current statistics show that suicide, drug overdose, anxiety diagnosis, and anti-depressant use are at least 2x above average for this time period. Can you imagine the studies and dissertations that PhD students are going to write in the coming months and years about what these mitigations are doing to the education, mental health, and future of our students?

I could tell more stories about how, after watching what happened to their sister, our 11th grade daughter and 12th grade son, weighed the option of pulling out of in-person learning to hopefully protect themselves from being traced in the days before their post season. Our older daughter is part of the 4-time state champion cross-country team and our son was on the state hopeful cross-country team and the varsity soccer team, looking to repeat a deep tournament run. I could tell

you about how they enrolled in digital courses to protect themselves and when they wanted to return to the classroom due to the unsatisfactory quality of academics it provided, they were denied that opportunity based on inconsistent district policies. I could tell you about our senior son being unable to do out-of-state college visits because he would have to quarantine for 14 days during his senior basketball season. I could tell you about him experiencing two 14-day quarantines due to contact and never getting sick. I could tell you about how we have felt forced to fight the administration in our district and how that has led some of them to treat us with contempt. I could tell you about how my children have been belittled by teachers for allowing their mask to fall below their nose for a few breaths of fresh air while they sat working quietly, and distanced, at their desks. I could tell you about how the words, actions, and body language of some of the teachers in my building make children feel as if they are a dangerous vessel of toxic waste. I could tell you about the students in my building who have skin rashes due to the constant sanitizing and washing, and those who exhibit clear evidence of intensifying anxiety as the year has gone on.

My hope is that this testimony is really just an echo of the many others that you will hear today. That you will be reminded that you were elected to be our voices in this government and advocate for us. None of us would deny that this virus exists and that there are some who have been negatively impacted. Our family has experienced this side of this virus, too, and the governor has made sure we've heard plenty of these stories. It is time for the many other heartbreaking stories that have resulted from our handling of this virus to be shared before the Assembly and the press. Our suffering is just as valid as the suffering of those whose stories Governor DeWine has chosen to pay attention to and share. We will continue to feel the impact,

and struggle to overcome the damage, of these emotional, mental, educational losses for years to come. They will potentially impact the trajectory of my children's lives long term.

Please hear, and really listen to, our stories and vote in favor of Senate Bill 22. Do everything you can to take back the power that the legislature should have always had during this crisis. We need to bring back a balance of power that will ensure that the actions of our government will continue to protect the vulnerable, and at the same time end the unnecessary suffering of millions of healthy Ohioans.