

Azure Stephens, Proponent
S.B. 22 - Government Oversight and Reform Committee
2/3/21

Testimony

Chairwoman Representative Kristina Roegner, Vice Chair Representative Rob McColley, Ranking member Hearcel Craig, and Honorable members of the committee. Thank you for allowing me to speak before you today. My name is Azure Stephens, I'm 22 years old, and I'm here today representing myself as a proponent for Senate Bill 22.

Freedom was something I took for granted. I memorized the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights when I was in school without fully grasping their significance. This year, as I've seen rights and freedoms become restricted around the world, I realized how fortunate I am to be an American Citizen. That said, I am concerned when I hear that there is language in our laws that gives "ultimate authority" to the health director, an official who is NOT elected by the people. I am concerned that the executive branch of government can make unilateral decisions. The founding principles of our nation is that power is distributed between all three branches of government. The fact that I am here now pleading that power be distributed fairly is concerning to me. This shouldn't even be a question to debate.

I want to acknowledge that compared to other states, Ohio is doing fairly well. I am so grateful my family has been able to keep our businesses open and make a living. But what if lines get crossed further and there is nothing set up to check executive power? What if our freedoms are removed or restricted further in the name of health? I understand the need for quick flexibility in emergency situations. This bill does not remove that power but ensures that the emergency measures taken are fair, just, and in the interests of the people.

I believe in true health and true health is a complex, multi-faceted issue. From my perspective our country and state has put a huge over-emphasis on one aspect of health -- avoidance of a virus -- and is not acknowledging the many other aspects, especially mental/emotional health. I have experienced more anxiety in the last year than I ever have before and I observe similar things in many of my peers. Restricting people from spending time together is not healthy and I wish to ensure this does not happen further than it has.

The last thing I want to say is how disappointing it is to see this bill hasn't been cosponsored by any democratic senate members. I grew up in a very liberal democratic community and I thought my values aligned with democratic values. I thought democrats would want to preserve our democracy. This situation is causing me to rethink what I thought I knew about the values of both parties. This issue should be a joint effort from EVERYONE in the legislature.

For the sake of our freedoms, equal powers of government, my generation and those to come, and our democracy at large, please vote yes on Senate Bill 22. Thank you very much.