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**Interested Party Testimony To The
Ohio Senate Government and Reform Committee
Wednesday, February 10, 2021**

To Chairwoman Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, and Ranking Member Craig thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony regarding S.B. 22. My name is Dr. Thomas File and I serve as chair of the Infectious Disease Division and Co-Director of the Antimicrobial Stewardship Program of Summa Health of Akron, Ohio. Summa serves as the largest healthcare provider and employer serving the greater Akron region. Our mission is to provide the highest quality, compassionate care to our patients and members and to contribute to a healthier community.

I am also honored to have served last year as president of the Infectious Diseases Society of America, a society comprised of 12,000 physicians, scientists, and public health experts who specialize in the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases and have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, caring for patients with COVID-19, developing infection prevention and patient management protocols, leading multidisciplinary hospital teams, directing state and local health departments and conducting research to deepen our understanding of COVID-19.

I am here today to offer Summa's commitment to help this committee, the Ohio General Assembly, and the Administration best respond to COVID-19, a virus that continues to impact the lives of millions at the national level and thousands of individuals and families across the great state of Ohio.

In my forty-four years of experience helping to prevent and treat infectious disease, I can say we are combating a virus that continues to evolve and requires the best and brightest medical and public health professionals to work together to help individuals avoid disease and stay well. When individuals are well, they have a greater ability to contribute to local and state economies. While the pandemic is currently our top priority, we continue to confront an array of infectious diseases epidemics and threats, including HIV, influenza, viral hepatitis, infections associated with injection drug use, sexually transmitted infections, tuberculosis and infections caused by multidrug-resistant pathogens.

Summa Health leadership reviewed the S.B. 22 legislative proposal and want to offer the following feedback and questions.

Oversight Committee Interaction with Federal and State Public Health Planning Efforts

S. B. 22 would establish a committee to provide oversight and authority over executive orders or emergency declarations. We would like to know how this committee would interact with existing federal and state public health emergency plans that are being coordinated and executed across public, private, and community sectors to best contain and eliminate this virus and other public health threats that are certain to emerge in the future.

We prefer a streamlined and efficient public health response because expeditious decisions are often required to respond to public health emergencies. These decisions are best made by experts in the field of infectious diseases and public health who are on the front line serving those affected by the pandemic.

Oversight Committee Engagement with Experts

It has been 11 months since the first COVID-19 case was detected in Ohio. At Summa, we have managed 4,381 COVID positive patients since the inception of the pandemic. My colleagues and I have been practicing medicine for decades and we have never witnessed in our careers such a widespread pandemic as COVID-19 which has been associated with so much sickness and death. This pandemic has stretched our facilities, services, and workforce. Because of our commitment to help individuals stay well, to serve those who are sick and dying, we respectfully request sponsors of S.B. 22 consider how best to engage healthcare experts with an oversight committee structure to ensure the state is advancing policy that values and protects public health.

Concluding Thoughts

I want to thank each of you for the opportunity to share our feedback and questions relative to the current S.B. 22 bill today. We have been working closely with the Governor, the state public health director, and other health systems and public health leadership across the northeast Ohio region and state to help prevent and treat COVID-19 disease. We humbly request that you continue to rely upon and trust our expertise to help shape and execute state's response to the pandemic because we, too, are committed to helping Ohio advance its health and economic recovery goals.

Please let me know if you have any questions or comments regarding my testimony.