

Email address: roegner@ohiosenate.gov

2/9/2021

Senator Kristina D Roegner, Chair Government Oversight and Reform Committee, Ohio Senate

Dear Senator Roegner:

While I am currently a Clinical Associate Professor at The Ohio State University in the College of Public Health, I previously served for many years as the Health Commissioner for Columbus. In that role, there were multiple times that the Ohio Director of Health's authority to declare a public health emergency was critical in protecting Ohioans' health and well-being, and saving lives. I write to ask that this message be submitted to the Senate Government Reform and Oversight Committee in opposition to Senate Bill 22.

Senate Bill 22, as introduced, would severely restrict the authority of the Director of Health to respond in a timely and efficient way to serious outbreaks of communicable disease and to public health emergencies that threaten the health and safety of Ohioans.

As the public health system, both state and local, works diligently with all partners to make our way out of this once-in-a-century pandemic, the effort has and will continue to be an all-in-this-together situation. Now is not the time to undermine the state's emergency response by stripping the state health director of authority that might be necessary to limit the spread of a virus that has resulted in the death of over 11,000 Ohioans to date. Now is the time to focus on Ohio's mass vaccination efforts, described by most experts as the most significant logistical challenge ever known.

This bill will also impact the Director's authority in times beyond the declaration of a public health emergency, such as during more common communicable disease outbreaks that impact multiple local jurisdictions. Emergency Authorities were critical to Ohio's responses to a 2015 multi-county botulism outbreak, to the H1N1 influenza pandemic (2009-10) and to the SARS outbreak in 2003. More recent examples include *Clostridium difficile* outbreaks in multiple long-term care facilities and a recent foodborne disease outbreak that originated in a meat packaging plant where product was shipped to locations statewide.

Please do not pass a bill that will tie up the Director's authority in a cumbersome legislative process that includes an oversight committee and concurrent resolutions by both chambers. Please protect health and save the lives of Ohioans and do not vote to take away the Director of Health's authority to declare a public health emergency. If I can be of further assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Teresa C. Long MD, MPH

Clinical Associate Professor, The Ohio State University

Retired Health Commissioner, City of Columbus