

On behalf of Allen County Combined Health District, I write to ask that this message be submitted to the Senate Government Reform and Oversight Committee in opposition to Senate Bill 22.

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

As a local public health department, we are working collaboratively with the Ohio Department of Health, and many other local and state-wide partners, to make our way out of this once-in-a-century pandemic. The effort has and will continue to be an "all hands on deck" situation for all of us at the local and state level engaged in this work. We have recently come out of the highest peak in cases we've since in the year we've been dealing with this novel Coronavirus - levels we weren't even imagining last spring as we worked around the state to save lives, limit the impact of illness, and protect our healthcare resources. Locally, we have felt the stress of hospitals pushed to their staffing limits to be able to care for residents in our community. This is not the time to strip the state health director of any authority, or limit the authority that might be necessary to contain the spread of this virus. Already, over 11,000 Ohioans have died. 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 situations outside of the declaration of a public health emergency, such as communicable disease outbreaks that impact multiple local jurisdictions, for example disease outbreaks that occur across local jurisdictions, or foodborne outbreaks where food products may be shipped to many locations statewide.

Requiring an oversight committee and concurrent resolutions by both chambers adds a cumbersome legislative process to efforts being taken in response to any threat to the preservation of the life and health of the people of Ohio. Rather than rewriting legislation while we are still responding to a very unique pandemic situation, legislative action in this area is best reserved for post-pandemic attention.

Sincerely,

Kathy Luhn

Kathleen A. Luhn, MS, RD, LD, MCHES
Health Commissioner
Phone: 419-228-4457 ext 136 | Fax: 419-224-4161
kluhn@allenhealthdept.org