



Secular Humanists of Western Lake Erie

February 10, 2021

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee, my name is Douglas Berger, and I am writing today on behalf of our members in opposition to Senate Bill 22 that would attempt to rescind any executive order issued by the Governor, or any emergency declaration issued by the Governor.

In preparing my remarks, I noted the LONG list of people who support this bill and the many personal stories they had to tell about how the Governor's orders and the Ohio Department of Health orders have affected their lives negatively. I would be a terrible person if I casually dismissed their experiences as they are valid during this strange time we live in since the onset of this pandemic. We all have struggled in some way.

I would hope members of the committee would consider the stories of the people who can't be here today or give their testimony in writing because they are dead from the virus. As of this letter, 11,793 Ohioans will no longer be able to eat in a restaurant, go to church, shop at a store, or hug their family because they are **DEAD**.

Although I don't agree with Governor DeWine on many political or policy issues, I thought he did a good job of responding to the pandemic in the early months. Where he has not done well is after some legislators and groups aligned with them and I assume even some on this committee threatened and cajoled him in watering down the response and reducing restrictions too early that gave us the surge we've seen since the fall.

Now you want to be able to arbitrarily override his orders if you feel like it and can get a majority of your colleges to sign on to a resolution?

Setting aside the obvious violation of the separation of powers, it is arrogance and hubris that you think you know more than scientists, medical doctors, virologists, Immunologists, and Epidemiologists not only in Ohio but the United States and in other parts of the world who have been focused on the pandemic for more than a year. There is so much we don't know about COVID-19 and what we do know is it is unlike anything we've seen in hundred years.

Supporters of this bill complained about the loss of freedom to do what they want to do which is ironic since many in the State House have voted repeatedly to deny women their right to make their own health care decisions, but the choice to ignore or overrule a public health order isn't limited to the person making the choice. Their choice can affect many other people. While you are having a fun night out at the local watering hole with friends, maybe one of them is carrying the virus or picks it up at the bar and takes it home where his 80-year-old aunt catches it and then dies. Your choice just ruined the

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lives of an entire family. The actual virus experts have said being inside around a large group of people eating or drinking significantly increases your chance of being infected and/or infecting others.

Since the state has failed to do what some whole countries have done to reduce the pandemic so the rest of us could return to a somewhat normal life, I have had to make the choice not to dine in any restaurants for the foreseeable future. The last time I ate in a restaurant was February 2020. I also miss not being able to go to the movie theater. But that is what has kept me, and my 76-year-old mother from being infected. She recently got her first vaccine dose.

Although I believe the legislature's constant undermining of the Governor's response to the pandemic has prolonged it here in Ohio, SB 22 will definitely prolong it, probably into 2022. Does this committee really want to focus on the short-term economic impact of public health orders, or would you rather have to deal with the long term negative economic impact as the pandemic drags on because you won't support what actually needs to be done to stop it.

As I tell some of my friends who complain about the public health orders, you can't eat at a restaurant, shop at a store, or have parties when you are on a ventilator or dead. I don't gamble as a matter of course so I defer to the actual experts on the virus and support any action by the Governor or Health Department that will protect us and reduce the length of the pandemic.

I urge this committee to let the Governor, in consultation with the experts, to do his job and vote no on Senate Bill 22.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Doug', written in a cursive style.

Douglas Berger - President