

Chairman Roegner, Vice-Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig and members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 22. I am Lisa Keller and I have served for the past 12 years as a member of Delaware City Council. I am most grateful for the opportunity to speak today.

As elected officials, I am certain that we can all agree that transparency is the cornerstone of representative government. In a public crisis, when unprecedented power is being wielded, this transparency and accompanying accountability becomes even more critical.

In response to the current situation, our Governor has exercised enormous unilateral authority. Mandates have been issued without legislative input; administrative enforcement procedures through multiple agencies have been implemented such as the Retail Compliance Unit and the Ohio Investigative Unit. The fate of violators has been ruled upon by appointed commission members. In essence, our executive branch has taken unto themselves all governmental power previously shared across the three co-equal branches of government.

The fundamental question before us today is not whether we agree or disagree with what the Governor has done. The fundamental question is- Is this way of making decisions consistent with the values of our democratic republic? Should our country's 244 year commitment to the wisdom of three co-equal branches be abdicated for indeterminate amounts of time at the will of one individual for the sake of an emergency? Or do emergencies in fact call for greater measures to ensure public trust, more opportunities for transparent decision making and an even higher level of justification expected for the actions being taken. In times of great crisis do we owe more or less to the people we represent?

As a public official, I have never felt more powerless in serving my community. My letters to the Governor have gone unanswered. Our City Manager's communications have gone unanswered. I have had to appear on the local news news asking for attention to serious issues impacting my community. I have had to use resolutions by my city's government to officially request data for our local health district: data critical for their local risk assessment and decision-making; data promised to us in June; data requested by official resolution at both the city and county level in September; data ordered to be provided in late October; data we still do not have in mid-February. We are therefore unable to determine our county's positivity rate and whether than rate is increasing or decreasing- impeding our decision making capability at the local level.

I am here before you pleading on behalf of my community to remain a participant in the chain of accountability and decision making in Ohio. But the decision maker isn't here. There is no forum like this available for me to speak to the Governor, no process such as this for me to participate. To be fair, our Governor cannot possibly provide that level of access to every Ohioan. This is precisely why our form of government never contemplated one individual answering to and being the sole voice of 11 million people.

This underscores the importance of you- the elected members of our legislative branch. Every email I've sent to my state level representatives has been answered, every phone call answered. Unfortunately, my state level representatives cannot provide the assistance I seek as they have been left out of these decisions as well. Oversight can be handled expeditiously in a crisis, in cooperation with our Governor.

Covid-19 has presented a grave challenge to our system of governance which has found itself dangerously off course. A vote against advancing this bill is a vote to render yourselves and the views of

the constituencies you represent irrelevant in Ohio's pandemic response and worse, irrelevant to our delicate balance of powers. You are too important to the people of Ohio to be irrelevant. Oversight should be no threat to sound decision making. I ask for your support of this bill.

I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.