

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Members Craig and the Honored Members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee,
My name is Heather Mercer. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony.

Today I am writing as a homeschool community leader and a small business owner and how the past year of Governor Dewine and the Ohio Department of Health's mandates have affected these aspects of my life and why I support Senate Bill 22.

As a small business owner, my business being a homeschool co-op support group that has served the Northeast Ohio homeschooling community for over 20 years. We are a non-profit that does not fundraise. All participants are volunteers, and we are all homeschooling our own children. We have 25 registered families, and our group affects 100 people per semester. Our homeschool co-op group solely survives on the membership dues of our group. If we do not meet for our semester's classes, the group does not collect dues. But the group's bills still exist. We will have insurance to pay. We still have administrative costs.

Since January 1, 2021 I have seen a 20% increase in the number of people searching for a support group, and a larger number of people reaching out looking for helpful information. As a support group, if we become extinct and the demand is going up for help - where does that put those who need the help? And what burden does that put on the other remaining homeschooling support communities whose leaders are also volunteering their time?

Everyone is always concerned about how the homeschoolers socialize. And here we have an opportunity to socialize, take classes and support those navigating this new, major change. The experts have been declaring for months that schools can be in session, children have low levels of transmission and if they do get sick they have less severe cases. Could we justifiably meet? Yes.

But herein lies the rub. We rely on a facility where we can meet. Typically we meet in churches. Are churches open? Supposedly. But many are afraid to open their doors. They are afraid of the possibility that someone would walk through those doors and contract Covid. So, they are not welcoming groups like ours to use their facilities.

In the course of a year we have had to cancel an entire spring semester of classes, and refund our dues. The church we were established to meet in for the fall semester pulled out of our agreement two weeks before our semester began, their decision driven by Covid concerns. We then had, for a second time, a decision to make: cancel again or find another facility on short notice? And as we prepare for our second semester of the school year, we are again, possibly, in the same position: cancel or exhaust ourselves again to find another place with short notice? All this with the majority of facilities hesitant to open their doors. If we cancel, we will not have raised enough funds from our dues to cover the possibility of a fall session for 2021. We could raise our dues price, sure. But let's not discuss what a burden that might add to families who have endured hardships of their own in the past year due to mandates.

Where does this leave us? Weekly hope that Dewine and the ODH make the decision to end the mandates based on the data that they report? Data that is poorly skewed when compared to the numbers that are publicly available from the ODH's website. And data that drives the mandates decisions that have an extraordinary amount of glaringly obvious clerical errors (such as dates of death occurring weeks before Covid onset date and/or hospitalization).

We have, as a collective society, spent the last year under "guilty until proven innocent, but you're still guilty" type mandates. But guilty = sick in this instance. We have been in a rapid fire adaptation for the past 330 days of "15 days to flatten the curve". What we are asking with SB22 is accountability and oversight for the actions done under the guise of emergency. We want to ensure our sovereign rights, constitutional rights, while taking consideration for those at risk. There must be meditative thought for the short and long term effects of these mandates, and if they are equally worth the risk as the supposed benefits. Loss of businesses, loss of livelihoods, the citizens' emotional and physical health, and what the effects of today will look like 2, 5, 10 years down the road, and beyond. All this, while not putting the power of these decisions into the hands of a select few individuals, but allowing we the people to govern ourselves.