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Proponent Testimony for SB 22

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and the honored members of the government oversight and reform committee, my name is Michelle Plecnik. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony.

I am a proponent of SB22 because those of us who see the harms of Covid policies have had our voices drowned out by the expert class. This expert class of mainstream doctors have elite privilege of getting their voices heard at the top levels of government. We need to be able to have our voices heard also. I tried calling and emailing the governor many times. He did not hear me. He did not respond. In fact, more recently, I was not even able to call since his phone number was removed from the website. The experts, however, have always had his ear this year. The governor is hearing only one side and then making decisions that affect us all. This must stop. We need a return to the balance of power, to ensure that the average citizen's voice is heard.

The Covid RESPONSE has caused more problems than Covid itself. We must be allowed to say "no" to medical expert advice that WE can see with our own eyes is truly hurting our lives much more than it is helping to curb this one virus.

The ongoing ability of a group of experts (the Ohio Dept of Health and mainstream hospitals) and one man (Governor DeWine) to singlehandedly decide which data gets included in prolonging our "state of medical emergency" - and thus their power to enact mandates - is medical fascism. My family came to this country to escape our country of origin that was tyrannical and murderous because too much power had been placed centrally. I know my own family history enough to know to be very alarmed when so much power over daily life is handed over to an elite group, especially when that same elite group scoffs -- and tell everyone else to scoff -- at anyone who may see things differently.

I have seen great spiritual, emotional and societal harm due to this intense singularly-focused approach by experts who tell us that the only thing that really matters this year is avoiding this particular virus - and shaming those who see things differently.

The governor and his experts have indicated to us that church doesn't matter, family Thanksgivings don't matter, hugs don't matter, wedding celebrations don't matter, smiles don't matter, faces don't matter - they've said all that matters is that you do not catch this ONE virus. They've told my patients that having family members at their bedside no longer matters - after years of nursing education that taught me the opposite, that patients do best when their loved ones are near them constantly! This is cruelty! I've seen hatred, discrimination and harassment in our grocery stores where there used to be neighborly smiles and conversation. I've seen division and hatred and fear in our families & churches where there used to be fellowship. Fear of others - seeing others as a germ rather than as a human -- is having a devastating effect. Shaming & blaming each other just for being what we are - a human being - is destroying families and society. Constant messages of Covid fear on billboards, and ODOT signs are causing immense problems - not solutions.

In our “old normal”, medicine was the art an individual doctor discussing with an individual, unique patients - of balancing risks vs benefits of any particular treatment. This past year, we have acted as if any random public policy against Covid can only have benefits – and no harms. There are many of us who are silently suffering the harms.

Medical professionals can give their expert opinion. However, we ourselves are the experts in our own complex lives. We must be allowed to make our own decisions. I’m a nurse – I have always made sure to advocate for my patient’s autonomy. I’ve always made sure my patients knew that the doctors’ advice was just that – advice – and that only the patient himself can decide whether the advice makes sense for his own life. After 15 years of advocating for my patients rights in this way, I am appalled that medical advice is being forced upon me. Please give us our autonomy back. Please give us our voice back.

There are many who are silently suffering, whose voices have been canceled:

- the isolated widower who only saw kind smiles when he went out grocery shopping;
- children & the mentally disabled who rely on kind facial expressions to be reassured of their surroundings;
- those survivors of past domestic abuse who are now forced to, once again, do things against their will;
- those who came to the US as refugees escaping oppressive tyranny, thinking that the US would always allow them their conscience rights who now are experiencing psychological trauma in seeing history on repeat;
- as well as those who physically are unable to tolerate the covering of our only mode of breathing and facial expression.

Think of the very young children –notice they no longer are brought with their parents to the grocery store. When is the last time that you saw a mother with children begging her to go down the ice cream aisle? It is not happening. Yes, likely some mothers are too afraid of Covid to bring their children – this opinion is blasted all over daily news. However, I propose that there are many, many more mothers who do not fear the virus but who fear other’s cruelty & blame – mothers who know innately that to bring their very young children into a faceless, inhumane, fearful crowd is dangerous and should be avoided if at all possible. I’ve had friends who are mothers with little children who need to see their faces, who have been harassed, screamed at and trailed through a store for trying to shop normally. How is that unity?? How is that healthy for society? The blame for all this fear and hatred rests on the Governor’s shoulders.

The only thing Governor Dewine and his experts in the ODH have done is to have added hatred, cruelty, blame and division on top of a virus problem. That is just about the worst way they could have handled things.

I would like to call out to both opponents and proponents of SB 22: we all have a shared goal – human thriving! We all want the same thing. Do not shame us! We are not “science deniers”, we are not “grandma killers”. We are like you. We want human thriving.

Those of us who are proponents of SB22 want human thriving in the holistic sense. We are seeing the harms of thinking of it only in the physical sense. I see the harms in the eyes of our family’s children, in the loneliness of our adults, in the depression of our teenagers, in

the suicides, in the family divisions. Please hear us, and not only these experts whose focus is so narrow.

These hyper-focused experts are paid to have a narrow focus on one part of life – physical health (and this year, even more hyper-focused, physical health in relation to this one virus). YOU, senators & representatives, are paid to have a wide focus on the holistic lives of all your constituents. It's time you hear us. Please pass SB 22, pass it immediately – we emergently need our real society back. Thank you.