

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Member Craig, and the honored members of the government oversight and reform committee, my name is Christina Weiss and thank you for allowing me to provide testimony in support of SB22.

I am a stay-at-home mother of 5 year old twins living in Cuyahoga County. Back in March 2020 when the “stay at home” order came out, I was not thrilled, but I thought, “I can do this for 2 weeks.” Then, 2 weeks turned into 2 months (more for some things). My children’s activities were cancelled for 3 months. For a stay at home mom with two, then 4 year olds who are very active, it was difficult to keep us all entertained. There was no where we could go and nothing we could do. My husband is in an “essential” industry so he wasn’t around to help. I couldn’t take my twins to the gym class or swim lesson that they loved or the tennis lessons they were so excited to start. We couldn’t see my mom. We couldn’t go to church. We couldn’t see our friends. The isolation and lack of help was overwhelming. To make matters worse, when I did go to the grocery store, I was looked at like a leper...just another potential disease carrier, not a human with human emotions and a desire for connection. This was, and still is, emotionally damaging. I was sad. I was lonely. I desperately needed social interaction that I could not have due to the mandates. I am fortunate that I did not fall into depression as many Ohioans have, but the social isolation was torment for someone who has always been a “social butterfly.” Although things have slowly opened up over the past 9 months and I do have some social outlets again, it’s not nearly what it was before all of this madness. Many of my friends are still nervous to get together right now because of the mandates, as well as, lies that have been propagated. Navigating each person’s feelings about the mask mandates, social distancing requirements, etcetera is tenuous. I feel anxious to invite my friends out to play dates and I have lost friends over differing opinions on the freedoms we should have. Yes, most businesses are open, but many restrictions still exist. Masks. Curfews. Capacity limits. Stay 6 feet away from everyone. Go one way down this aisle. Are these things really preventing the spread of COVID? I’d say we do not have the data to support that they are. But we do know that they are damaging the lives of Ohioans in many different ways.

Early on, having to explain to my children why we couldn’t go anywhere was heartbreaking. They were used to playdates, visits to the local attractions, and multiple other activities that kept us busy and enjoying life. I’ve tried to keep things as normal as possible for them, but they know things are not “right.” Their gym and ballet teachers wear masks. Some of their peers wear masks. They’re told to stand in their “circles” so as not to get too close to other kids. We still cannot attend certain places they used to love to go. We cannot be spontaneous like we used to be because we have to schedule everything due to capacity limits. They are losing their ability to learn about facial expression and social cues. Our recreation center is still not open so they are unable to try new activities. Some of our local kid-focused businesses, such as the Cleveland Aquarium, Botanical Gardens and Museum of Natural History, are requiring kids 2+ to wear masks and I refuse to play the game of pretending that children are a significant risk for spreading the virus (there are many studies from many countries that prove they do not). So I do not take my children to places that require them to wear masks. Therefore, my kids

are missing these opportunities to learn and play because these businesses feel they can hide under the cover of the governor's mandates. Beyond that, there are some places we used to enjoy visiting that are still closed and may never re-open.

I will not teach my children to live in fear of this virus, but there are so many parents that are and it breaks my heart. These parents are being manipulated into fear by the governor's mandates and press conferences and are passing that fear to their children. Our children, especially the ones with fearful parents, will be damaged for the rest of their lives by the consequences of Ohio's overreaction to this virus. They have fallen behind in education. They have been taught to see people as germ bags. They've been taught to see themselves as dangerous to others just by breathing. They aren't able to run and play with their friends...to form bonds. They aren't able to read and learn about facial expressions. Those that are in school can't even show their precious faces and have to stay 6 feet away from their peers. It will be many years before the repercussions of these actions on our children will be fully known.

In addition, the mask mandates create an unsafe environments for children in that child traffickers are able to better hide their identity from security cameras, law enforcement. I'm sure you are aware that Ohio is a hotbed for this kind of activity and now we are making it easier for them to do what they do! And, if they would take a child, duck tape their mouth and pop a mask on them, no one would think anything of it because the masks are so "normal." This, obviously, also applies to other criminal activity, but as a mom, trafficking is top of mind.

Lastly, I am an Independent Beauty Consultant with Mary Kay and these mandates have been detrimental to my small business. Our business model works best when we can meet with women and let them try the product. However, due to all of the mandates and restrictions, many women are unwilling to get together for these types of appointments which makes gaining new clients very difficult. And because of the mask mandates and people being forced to work from home if it's unnecessary for them to come into the office, many of my clients have told me they no longer wear makeup. This combination of issues has been damaging to my business and, therefore, profits. In addition to the financial hit, my inability to hold in-home parties also contributes to my social isolation.

Beyond my story, I've seen the ways this has impacted my sister who is a single mother. She struggled to figure out how to continue to work and make sure her children are educated at the same time. She has to put food on the table and relies on the "childcare" provided by in-person school to be able to work. Fortunately, she has found a work around, but is still worried about what will happen next year of the schools don't open, open part-time or open with crazy restrictions.

I've seen my 70 year old widowed neighbor become stuck in her home because she is fearful of the virus and all of the governor's orders. I've seen my husband's grandma's dementia worsen because of the lack of interaction with loved ones. I've watched my mother-in-law go through depression and anxiety to the point we thought she might need in-patient treatment. I've known people out of work because of the restrictions placed on their businesses. I think it's time for "We the People" to have our power back.

I know my story isn't as dramatic as others' may be. However, I wanted to share it so that you can see that it isn't just the big cases of people losing their jobs or becoming addicted to substances, but how isolating and damaging these mandates are to the lives of every single one of us, and especially our precious kids. We need to have the freedom to assess our own risks and benefits daily choices. I ask that you please vote to pass SB22 and limit Governor DeWine's ability to unilaterally enact these emergency orders and mandates. These types of actions should be debated and decided upon by our body of representatives, not one man. Please, take back the power that is rightfully yours by the the constitution. If you do not do it now, I worry what might happen when the next "crisis" comes along and when another, potentially, even more tyrannical person is on office.

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