

Good morning Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the committee, thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to provide written testimony.

My name is Claudia Amrhein. I have lived in Kent, Ohio for 40 years and I am GM/CEO of Portage Area Regional Transportation Authority (PARTA) in Portage County, Ohio. I am here respectfully to urge you to remove the provision in HB 110 that would eliminate local Boards of Health in cities with populations of fewer than 50,000 residents.

I moved to Kent in 1981 to attend college and I never left. As a former student, resident, parent, and former City of Kent employee, I have witnessed the benefits of having a health department dedicated to the residents of Kent and the additional 25,000+ Kent State University students who populate Kent for most of the year.

Kent State is the second largest public university in Ohio. The Kent City Health Department (KCHD) is responsible for inspecting student housing and all food establishments. KCHD works closely with the university on health and safety initiatives built upon years of collaboration and professional relationships deeply engrained in our community. KCHD also worked closely with the Kent community members and KSU during the recent state accreditation process interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, KCHD moved its administrative offices into the Kent Central Gateway Multimodal Facility in downtown Kent. PARTA owns and operates the facility, which is a fully ADA-accessible building that includes a 10-bay transit bus transfer center, a three-level parking deck, and ground-level retail spaces.

The presence of KCHD in PARTA's multimodal facility ensures equal access for all Portage County residents. The unique opportunity to locate in a public transit center and parking deck removes transportation barriers that often prevent or delay underserved populations from accessing essential health services.

KCHD's location within PARTA's transit center and public parking deck is especially important because KCHD also maintains recorded Ohio birth and Portage County death certificates. All Portage County residents rely on KCHD for access to certified copies these birth and death records. Beginning in 2021, KCHD and PARTA began discussing expanding their presence in the multimodal facility to a vacant ground-level space for public health clinics and programs. Unfortunately, the proposed provision to dissolve city health departments like Kent's has halted these discussions.

Finally, during COVID-19, KCHD has served as a vital resource for information and support for containing the spread of the virus both on campus and throughout the community.

I respectfully request the Senate remove the provision in the budget bill that would effectively dissolve the Kent City Health Department, a vital and stable resource and essential presence in our community.

Thank you very much for your consideration.