



## City of New Philadelphia

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### **TESTIMONY TO THE OHIO SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEE**

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking member Antonio and members of the Health Committee: thank you for giving us the opportunity to speak in opposition to the language in H.B. 110 that could lead to the closure of the New Philadelphia City Health Department. My name is Joel Day, and I am the Mayor of New Philadelphia, Ohio.

Joining me in opposition to the idea of merger and closure is New Philadelphia City Council president Don Kemp. At its most recent meeting, City Council approved a resolution to strongly oppose the feasibility study language in H.B. 100 and defend the vital services the New Philadelphia Health Department provides to the residents and businesses in our city. All of us were angered by the fact that no forewarning of this idea was given and no visits were made to our health department to discuss it beforehand. Those of you who have served in municipal government know that something of this magnitude and public impact should have come forth as separate legislation and not as an amendment in a budget bill.

As the county seat, the City of New Philadelphia has always played a leadership role in Tuscarawas County and in the Appalachian region. Schoenbrunn Village, on the east side of town, was founded in 1772 as a Moravian mission among the Delaware Native American nation. It was Ohio's first Christian settlement, and in it was built Ohio's first schoolhouse. Schoenbrunn also had the state's first civil code. Missionary David Zeisberger's success at Schoenbrunn motivated the Moravian Church to establish four other missions in the county along the Tuscarawas River. Schoenbrunn Village is an Ohio History Connection site, visited by school kids and hundreds of tourists each year. Our health department has worked with the village's local managers during the pandemic to allow annual fundraising events to continue with COVID-19 protocols.

A short distance away is Harry Clever Field, where astronaut and U.S. Senator John Glenn learned to fly. And just down the road from Schoenbrunn is the City's East Avenue Cemetery, where Ohio Governor Vic Donahey and members of his family are buried.

And as you have learned from Commissioner Ionno's and Director Bache's testimonies, throughout the coronavirus pandemic the county and region continued to look to New Philadelphia for leadership. They have given you the numbers to show the impact our health department has on our community. The department and its staff of seven provides all those services and reaches all those people while receiving just **\$3200.00 per year** in direct state funding.

Since the state mandated accreditation in 2013, the New Philadelphia Health Department has spent, to date, **\$275,040.00** to achieve that designation. And we are on schedule to meet the August 26<sup>th</sup> deadline to upload and submit the necessary documentation.

In this year's annual budget, City Council appropriated \$437,060.00 to fund the Health Department. Most of that money comes from the City's one and a half percent income tax. Given the City's current listed population of 17,372, each resident is paying around \$25.00 a year for public health services. If our health department was forced to merge with the county's, New Philadelphia residents would have to pay an additional tax, the county health department's one mill property tax, for less public health services. A merger would threaten the elimination of the 21 additional services provided by our health department.

Closure of our health department would have a profound impact on our City's Hispanic population. Over the past five years, hundreds of Latinos from Guatemala and Mexico have taken up residence in New Philadelphia. They work at local farms and factories. Their kids attend our schools. Both children and adults come to the City Health Department for immunizations and other public health services.

Four years ago our health department teamed with Municipal Court Judge Nan VonAllman to create a Recovery Court, where addicts convicted of crimes can enter a recovery program through the health department. It became a model for other courts to follow. The pandemic put the program on hold. That could be a reason why that, over the past year, nineteen people in the city have died of drug overdoses.

Mergers of health districts should be a local decision, made voluntarily. It should not be ordered on high by state government, ignoring the principles and purpose of home rule authority. New Philadelphia will continue to oppose any attempt to erode home rule and centralize power in regions or in Columbus.

When John Knisely, a Quaker from Pennsylvania, founded our city in 1804, he named it New Philadelphia after the original city of brotherly love. Over the years we have held fast to his vision for our city. And today, that brotherly love flows through the New Philadelphia City Health Department to our residents, businesses and anyone who needs help. Chairman Huffman and members of the Senate Health Committee, I call on you to lead the effort to strike any language from H.B. 110 that threatens the closure of our health department. It is unnecessary and a bad idea, particularly in the midst of a global pandemic.

Thank you for giving the City of New Philadelphia the opportunity to present our side of the story.

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