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Ashtabula City Health Department

**Interested Party Testimony
Ashtabula City Health Department
Health Commissioner Christine L. Hill
House Bill 110**

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on my opposition to the language in Sub House Bill 110 section 3709.012.

My name is Christine Hill, Health Commissioner of the Ashtabula City Health Department. Speaking on behalf of my department, my board of health and my community, I respectfully request the removal of the provisions added in the Sub HB 110 that requires a city with a population with less than 50,000 to engage in an efficiency and effectiveness study and based on the results of the study, mandates a merger with a general health district of the county.

Ashtabula City is located in the northern most section of Ohio's geographic largest county, Ashtabula. Residents in the city of Ashtabula experience high rates of poverty. Children in our city school system qualify at 100% for the free reduced lunch program. Transportation has been identified as a major gap for our residents to receive services. Centralizing public health services 20 miles away from the city of Ashtabula would serve to only widen that disparity. The Ashtabula City Health Department is in a unique position to deliver high quality public health services to our residents having built a solid and trusting relationship with them. Efficiently responding to the COVID 19 pandemic has served to illustrate this point.

As financial support for our health department is largely based on local funds, we feel strongly that decisions about the delivery of local public health services should be left to the local municipality and their residents.

The Ashtabula City Health Department has a long and proud history spanning more than 100 years serving our residents. Mandating our department complete an efficiency and effectiveness survey is both reckless and redundant. Reckless in the fact that our department is in the midst of fighting the ongoing COVID -19 pandemic. Our resources are focused as they must be on our daily duties as well as pandemic response. As you well know, the public health system in Ohio has been stressed due to the enormous responsibilities associated with mitigation and response efforts in controlling of the COVID – 19 pandemic. Requiring and diverting time and resources be assigned to a feasibility study as we continue our response efforts is inequitable, unfair, wrong and reckless. I question the discrimination of singling out city health departments

serving less than 50,000, should not all local health departments be able to prove efficiency and effectiveness? All local health departments in Ohio are mandated to reach accredited status. Public health accreditation is the measurement of a health department's performance against a set of nationally recognized, practice-focused and evidenced-based standards. I must call your attention to this redundancy of an evaluation process as one already exists and is legislatively required. Our department has expensed a great deal of time, talent and financial resources in pursuing accreditation. PHAB accreditation has long been held in the highest regard as the gold standard for effective and efficient health departments.

The merger of local health departments should remain voluntary, a local decision and driven by community needs, resources and be grounded in data. Now is not the time to regulate any such forced merger, instead all local health departments should have additional resources to strengthen and support their mission from their state government.

Thank you for your consideration