

Thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony in opposition to the merger of small city health departments into county-wide departments.

I would like to begin by recognizing the tireless efforts and essential role of the New Philadelphia Health Department during the COVID-19 pandemic. These nurses and support staff stepped up to the plate and met the needs of our city in the face of daunting tasks and overwhelming odds.

Another important public health issue facing New Philadelphia, which I deal with on a daily basis in my court, is alcohol and drug addiction, including abuse of opioids, fentanyl and methamphetamine. There is a continuous need for quality treatment in this city. New Philadelphia has the highest rate of overdose EMT calls and overdose deaths in our county. Addiction in our city impacts the personal safety of citizens, local law enforcement, and first responders. People with substance abuse and co-occurring mental health disorders overburden our small local hospitals and overcrowd our jails. New Philadelphia schools must deal with the children who end up in foster care. Local employers need reliable employees who can pass a drug test. Addiction in a small town takes a special toll. The names and faces are not abstract to us. The addicts, the victims, the children and the dead are people we know from school, church, work and our neighborhoods.

The New Philadelphia Health Department took direct and targeted action to help fight addiction when our county health department was already spread thin meeting other general health needs. New Philadelphia Health Commissioner Vickie Ionno and her nurses have provided essential support and guidance to my New Philadelphia Municipal Recovery Court program, a drug treatment docket certified by the Ohio Supreme Court. Commissioner Ionno is an integral member of my recovery court team. She was one of the first to investigate medication assisted treatment locally for opiate addiction. She and her director of nursing were instrumental in establishing one of the earliest Vivitrol programs in rural Ohio. That program has saved countless lives. She also helped us to navigate the Ohio Board of Pharmacy prescription drug investigation program called OARRS, an important tool in holding Defendants accountable in

recovery. Our city public health nurses also test for communicable diseases prevalent among inmates and addicts, such as HIV and hepatitis-C, preventing spread into the wider community.

We have all heard that, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." Everyone knows that preventing illness and disease is cost effective. I would assert that we should be supporting, not diluting, access to public health services in Ohio.

It is inevitable that merger will negatively affect our local families, leading to increased wait times for services and decreased availability of preventative healthcare.

There simply is no need, and no desire, locally for merger of our city and county health departments, and I urge you to leave decisions of this nature to the citizens of New Philadelphia and their duly-elected government officials.

Respectfully submitted,

Nanette DeGarmo VonAllman

Judge Nanette DeGarmo VonAllman
New Philadelphia Municipal Court