

HB618 Proponent Testimony

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Concerned Citizen and Parent

House State and Local Government Committee

November 18, 2020

Chairman Wiggam, Vice-Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and Members of the House State and Local Government Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to allow written testimony for HB618. I am a licensed professional counselor and a certified school guidance counselor. I studied child psychology and human development at The Ohio State University and Ohio University. I have worked as an outpatient therapist for children and adolescents, as well as a substitute teacher and guidance counselor in public education. I am also a parent of three children and the wife of a US Army Veteran and police officer.

I am **in support of HB618** because I believe that the overreach and unqualified powers of one elected official and one unelected official have caused significant, and perhaps irreparable, damage to many children and adolescents throughout the state of Ohio. Social development is a fundamental need for youth, yet the powers of two individuals have forced this specific population to cease (or disrupt) their natural born rights for expanded growth during their critical social developmental years.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs states that love and belonging, meaning friendship and a sense of connection within a community, are foundational needs for humans. Isolating young children, adolescents, and teenagers from their peers denies them of this basic human right to interact within their proper peer groups. Forced isolation and restriction from necessary peer interactions dismisses the fundamental psychosocial stages one must go through to become a healthy, confident, and socially functioning adult.

Additionally, due to decreased, intermittent, or non-existent peer interactions, school-aged children are struggling with poor mental health issues, decreased learning comprehension, loss of focus, and a lack of desire to learn and perform well in academics. Many notable psychologists have agreed that social interaction is necessary to promote cognitive development. Vygotsky, a social psychologist, established that social interaction is necessary to achieve successful learning.

I have witnessed my own children struggling with the effects of the mandates and shutdowns. They struggle with concentration, feeling hopeless, and grieving the loss of daily peer interactions and normalcy. As a parent, I am concerned about their social development and long-term well-being. I am equally concerned for all youth across our state who are being

negatively and unfairly affected by the tyrannical and unqualified orders and mandates set forth by two individuals who are denying our youth of their natural born rights to live fully and freely.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of HB618.

Laura McNamara-Smith, LPC

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