

FROM THE DESK OF

Sara Gleason

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HB 618 Proponent Testimony

Sara Gleason

House State and Local Government Committee

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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding HB 618 today. My name is Sara Gleason. I am a resident and constituent of the great state of Ohio, a college educated social scientist, a business woman, a military spouse and a mother, and **I am writing to share my support for HB 618.**

I am a proponent of HB618 because I firmly believe that it is past time to rethink how our state approaches response to health crises. The response has been singularly focused on SARS-CoV-2 without consideration for data that suggests that robust responses have contributed to the un-wellness and un-safety of Ohioans and the erosion of liberty. We have seen unprecedented impacts upon the lives and livelihoods of Ohioans. Many are jobless, many are experiencing food insecurity, and we have seen an uptick in poor health and mental health outcomes. There are increases in incidents of domestic violence and child abuse, suicides and overdose. There is a lack of therapeutic services and care for special needs families, a lack of support for those in recovery. All the while anxiety and depression are increasing. Our economy is suffering and the middle class dwindling before our eyes. And Ohioans, buffeted by near daily doses of fear-centric language from executive leadership, have now become so fearful that we are encouraged to look at one another with suspicion if they are unable to cover their faces with a mask. Humanity itself is suffering for this hyper focus on the virus and the rules for its mitigation.

Decisions made in the name of safety inhibited Ohioans' access and right to a fair and free election during the primary elections. Decisions made in the name of safety have led to the voices of the general assembly becoming largely irrelevant or impotent. Decisions in the name of safety have impacted the rights of individuals and groups to gather in worship. Decisions in the name of safety threaten personal sovereignty.

Decisions in the name of safety have increased social shaming, isolation, and have had disproportionate impacts on impoverished and disenfranchised persons. All of this continues with unclear endpoints in a murky war against a so-called "invisible enemy". All of this is owing to unchecked power from our governor and an unelected office holder and is a careless use of outdated Ohio codes.

It is so clear that it is time to address the landscape that allowed this to happen. Because while Ohioans have been feeling the weight of uncertainty and fear during this crisis, we still value the legislative process and the distinct checks and balances that are in place to allow for due diligence on important issues. In fact, the value of the legislative process, due process and checks and balances are **more** important than ever in times like these. We cannot let fear continue to drive us to a place where the executive guides and charts the course of Ohioan lives with arbitrary and unilateral decisions through the office of an unelected official or department; and does so without input from the legislative, the judiciary, or the people.

It is time for balance. It is time for reconsideration and reassessment of the codes as they stand. I support measures to re-balance the power of our state and re-visit and limit the authority of the Ohio Department of Health as outlined in HB 618. I support giving greater amplitude to the voice of the people through our duly elected legislators.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony and thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sara Gleason