

Rep. Stephens:

My name is Chris Alusheff, I am a councilman in Aquilla Village and Aquilla's representative to the Geauga County HDAC. 2 weeks ago was my first HDAC meeting and I think the language in your bill, while I agree with some, would eviscerate the essence of democracy in action that I witnessed at the HDAC meeting.

I would like to start by saying that I very much like the idea to designate specific seats on the board to a certain group of stakeholders in the community (County, Townships, municipalities, medical professionals, schools) but taking the appointment power from a relatively large group (22 HDAC members in Geauga County) and giving it to a small group of 3 commissioners seems antithetical to openness.

To make an example of our recent HDAC meeting: the last year in public health was tumultuous in Geauga County as it was in many places and it drew a heavy amount of public scrutiny (including from myself). There were 5 candidates for the open BOH position, including the incumbent who had served 2 terms. Of the 5 candidates, 1 in particular had an immense amount of support from the general public. People were sending letters and making phone calls to their trustees, mayors and commissioners urging them to appoint this one candidate. I have not heard of a single call made on behalf of any of the other 4 including the incumbent. So the HDAC interview screening committee recommended to the HDAC that they reappoint the incumbent for another 5 years, at least 10 members of the public spoke at the meeting on behalf of the one candidate, as did a few HDAC members. When it came time to vote, after public comment and a few comments from within HDAC membership, something extraordinary happened. The majority of the screening committee members went against their own endorsement and backed the candidate with the public support, that candidate ultimately won handily, BUT the county commissioner that was present on behalf of the BOC voted for a completely different candidate.

It was the commissioners' right and prerogative to vote for any of the candidates, but I think this anecdote illustrates the necessity for a spirited debate and input from the public and a broader swath of the local elected officials than just 3 commissioners, especially when the commissioners probably received more phone calls in support of the candidate than any other single office in the county and still bucked the will of the people in support of someone else.

It was also mentioned at your initial hearing on this bill that the HDAC is "a board appointing a board" that is simply factually incorrect, it is a council of directly elected officials (trustees, mayors, commissioner) appointing a board, and hopefully with carefully considered input from the constituents they represent and work for. Of all the onerous encumbrances of entrenched government bureaucracy that need to be addressed and abolished, replacing a council of many elected officials at the most local level of government, with a much smaller group of (often aloof, to be blunt) elected officials seems like a bad idea.

I think a much better idea would be to keep the make up of the HDAC intact and do something like form a subcommittee to put forth nominations for the seat representing the townships, and another for the seat representing municipalities and so forth.

I could not agree more with you that the public trust in public health has been severely diminished and think you are onto something in approving that trust with more direct representation, but I urge you to reconsider how you propose to go about the BOH nominating process.

Respectfully Submitted,

Chris T. Alusheff II

Aquilla Village, Ohio