



Testimony before the
House State and Local Government Committee

House Bill 463
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Chairman Wiggam, ranking member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, I am Erik Balster, Health Commissioner of the Butler County General Health District and President of the Association of Ohio Health Commissioners (AOHC), the state association representing Ohio's 112 local health districts. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, on behalf of AOHC, in opposition to House Bill 463, which proposes the elimination of the District Advisory Councils of general and combined health districts.

Current law assures representation and voting rights for elected officials from all political subdivisions served by the health district through their seats on the District Advisory Council. House Bill 463 proposes that the responsibility to appoint local Board of Health members be transferred to the County Commissioners. The other political subdivisions, such as cities, villages and townships, served by the health district would no longer have a vote in Board of Health appointments. We believe this change would result in less representation and decision making by all political subdivisions served by the health district, thereby making the process less inclusive and transparent.

Current law requires any health district budget, if that budget proposes an appropriation apportioned among the townships and municipal corporations composing the district, to go before the county Budget Commission for approval. The elected officials who serve on the Budget Commission may reduce that apportionment, as it sees fit. It is important to note that none of the county's inside millage can be appropriated and apportioned through this process. Therefore, it doesn't make sense to transfer the local health district budget approval process to the County Commissioners.

AOHC is actively working with the bill sponsor to identify ways to make these processes more transparent to the public. Simply consolidating the appointing/approval body to the County Commissioners does not increase accountability of the Board of Health nor the transparency of the processes and decisions of the Board of Health.

The proposals in HB 463 will not resolve the local issues brought to light in discussions with the bill sponsor and other interested parties, most notably concerns about state rules that govern most delegated state programs (e.g., food, home sewage) and COVID-19 mandates and enforcement dictated by orders of the Governor and/or the Director of Health.

For all of these reasons, AOHC asks you to not move House Bill 463 forward in its current form. Since the bill's introduction, we have been actively working with the sponsor and all interested parties to improve the current processes without limiting the voice of political subdivisions who contribute a portion of their inside millage for the operation of the health district.

Respectfully, we request time to work with the bill sponsor and all of you to address the issues you hope this bill will address, while maximizing transparency, accountability and most importantly, the voices of the local political subdivisions served by the local health districts.

I have attached to our testimony an example from Allen County about how their District Advisory Council worked very actively to direct the budget proposals of the health district, as well as two letters of concern from county commissioners who could not appear in person today.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns. I am happy to answer any questions.

