



## **Columbiana County Health District**

P.O. Box 309 – 7360 State Route 45 – Lisbon, Ohio 44432

**Phone:** 330-424-0272 – **General Fax:** 330-424-1733 – **Nursing Fax:** 330-424-1843

**Email:** cchd@columbiana-health.org **Web:** www.columbiana-health.org

**Testimony of  
Wesley J. Vins, MS  
Health Commissioner  
Columbiana County General Health District**

**Before the Ohio House of Representatives'  
State and Local Government Committee**

**May 10, 2022**

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair John, Ranking Member Kelly and Members of the State and Local Government Committee, my name is Wesley Vins. I am the Health Commissioner of the Columbiana County General Health District and I thank you for the opportunity to speak on House Bill 463 on behalf of the Columbiana County Board of Health. I have served the local community for more than 20 years following 7 years with a private consulting firm and I am very familiar with the operation and function of an effective Health District Advisory Council as well as the duties of a Board of Health. The Board of Health and I have had decades of success in partnering with local officials and we are disappointed in the false testimony presented to this committee on April 6, 2022 by a Columbiana County official regarding HB 463.

The April 6<sup>th</sup> testimony presented *“To sum it up, the Health Commissioner’s wages accounts for 38.5% of all the dollars the subdivisions pay into operating the health department.”* This is false. In reality, the portion of Health Commissioner’s 2021 salary that was not funded with grants was appropriately distributed across multiple agency programs. **0%** of this salary was funded from the \$383,000 dollars of inside millage shared with the subdivisions.

During the same testimony, it was said *“the health board has gone out and made a deal with the third largest city...”* which is also false. The fact is, as defined in the Ohio Revised Code section 3709.08 C(2)b, the 2016 contract with the City of Columbiana was approved by the majority of members of Health District Advisory Council and this reported “special arrangement” was signed by the April 6<sup>th</sup> witness, who served as the HDAC Chairman in 2016.

The April 6 testimony of *“Today, you can’t get any one of our health department, uh, health board phone numbers, even I can’t get it.”* is additionally false. Contrary to the testimony, Board of Health members are accessible to the public and elected officials at regular monthly meetings, on the phone and in person. Multiple Columbiana County Board of Health members confirm speaking with the April 6<sup>th</sup> witness on the phone and routinely passing him on the sidewalk near the courthouse.

You were also falsely informed on April 6<sup>th</sup> that the Health District monthly building rent is \$36,000, when the actual monthly rent has been verified by the building owner to be \$4,200.

The rare public health complaints received by the County Commissioner's office are, and should be forwarded to the Health Commissioner for resolution. These complaints normally arise from a resident being unfamiliar with the state law or unreceptive the health district's responsibility and duty to enforce state laws, state rules and state health orders. Complaints can be publicly presented directly to the Board of Health and in these rare instances agency staff compliance with state laws, rules and health orders are subsequently verified, as are timely returned phone calls.

Contrary to critics, local health districts are held very accountable as prescribed in numerous law and rules by routinely completing audits for programs and financials, surveys, performance standards at the state and national level, quality indicators and quality improvement initiatives. Ohio health districts also have a high level of transparency where the budgeting process is very public, which is shared with the political subdivisions prior to approval by the Board of Health and the County Budget Commission.

In Columbiana County we have had strong success and participation by our Health District Advisory Council, including township trustees, village mayors and county commissioners, where a strong quorum convenes annually for an interactive review of the community's health status and a unanimous appointment of a Board of Health member 13 of the last 14 years. House Bill 463 eliminates the active participation of all political subdivisions that contribute to the financial support of local health districts and the loss of the involvement of the community's cross-section of township trustees and village mayors will likely prove to be detrimental to the public's health when the voices of those representing the most vulnerable residents in our local neighborhoods are lost.

We have all learned a lot over the last two years and it was the strong partnerships with the community, including elected officials at all levels of government that brought us together for the benefit of our residents. Through the recent crisis, we also recognized the need to modernize public health in Ohio by addressing vulnerable populations, advancing emergency preparedness, creating stronger partnerships, improving data systems and developing a stable public health workforce. Unfortunately, House Bill 463 does not contain provisions to address what we have learned.

In Summary, I would like to thank you again for the opportunity to present today to correct misinformation provided to the committee on April 6<sup>th</sup> and for your support of the ongoing effort to make Ohio a healthier place to live, work and play.

At this time, I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.