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Eric J. Zgodzinski, DrPH, MPH, RS, CPH
Health Commissioner

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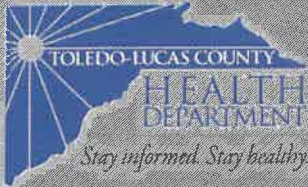
Senator Tim Schaffer
Chairman, Agricultural and Natural Resources Committee
Senate Building
1 Capital Square, 1st Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Senator Schaffer,

The need to promote and sustain a high functioning and capable public health workforce to ensure safe food and a sound food industry cannot be overstated. In Ohio, Registered Environmental Health Specialists (REHS) are the workforce that protects every community from food-related illnesses and issues. These individuals rely on state-of-the-art food science, common sense, honed observational skills, and partnerships with food facility operators to decrease the liability for food-related diseases. Like any successful professional, REHS must be evaluated and have the opportunity to improve their craft. In order to facilitate this professional growth, the current evaluation system requires reengineering to produce the best outcomes for all involved in Ohio's food safety and security.

The current field survey process of Local Health Departments by the Department of Agriculture (ODA) and Department of Health (ODH) has been cause for concern for many years. These concerns center on the need for a more standardized, equitable, and unified food survey process between ODA and ODH to ensure uniform assessment of local health districts. I do commend ODH and ODA for attempting to address some of the inherent issues with the process, but ultimately the field survey process has never been sufficiently and appropriately addressed. This has led to negative downstream effects both for regulated entities and the local health departments tasked to ensure safe compliance with the Food Code.

The resulting experience for some local health departments has been a lack of collaboration, education, or the application of a risk-based approach to positively impact food safety across Ohio. The current ODA and ODH food field survey process often create pressure to "count" as many violations as possible as the primary method to demonstrate an appropriate working knowledge of the Food Code. This current way of evaluation leads to dramatic and unwarranted increases in survey inspection times, and fiscal costs, which may also lead to increased licensing fees for the industry. Further, the process can reduce the focus of addressing those risk-based issues within a facility by focusing on the total tally of countable issues.



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Whenever individuals leave home to eat out, their risk for food-related illness due to improper handling, storage, or cleanliness of facilities increases. However, these risks are dramatically reduced when an appropriately trained and motivated food safety team can form a healthier relationship with regulated entities based on mitigating risk. The development of an even better food safety program and better-prepared REHS workforce is why I support Senate Bill 338 and any similar bill that works towards this goal. I appreciate your dedication to the health of all who live, learn, work, and play in our state.

Sincerely,

Eric J. Zgodzinski, DrPH, MPH, REHS, CPH
Health Commissioner
Toledo-Lucas County Health Department