

March 21, 2021

The Honorable Governor Mike DeWine
Riffe Center, 30th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Governor DeWine:

We write to express strong opposition to Senate Bill 22. SB22 inserts a layered political process in the protection of public health and safety, and it proposes changes with broad reaching implications for our state's ability to deploy and sustain a strong, urgent and coordinated response to emergencies of many types. While we depend on our county departments of health and emergency management to effectively meet statutorily mandated duties to protect the health of county residents and work collaboratively with residents and businesses to respond to local needs, this work in turn depends on a strong state backbone, especially to address the spread of infectious disease across multiple counties, and also in the case of state emergency or disaster declarations that benefit from predictability and consistency to pull down federal emergency and disaster funding.

We are furthermore concerned that the final stages of SB 22's development added provisions limiting the authority of local boards of health. Especially concerning are those provisions which limit public health orders to only those connected to individuals or businesses with confirmed disease diagnoses or exposure. Local health orders are crucial tools for allowing time for a full investigation of a situation before it becomes urgent or worsened, and the limitations in SB 22 will force our local efforts to allow a situation to develop further before action could be taken to contain it. For example, if there is a foodborne illness outbreak for which we have a strong lead on its source but are awaiting testing and investigation, an inability to mitigate the suspected source will allow the illness more time to spread. As another example, if a number of individuals are showing symptoms of a disease like measles but test results are pending, lack of quarantine and isolation orders would allow time for others to be exposed. Orders like these are utilized sparingly, but they are vital resources when situations arise where we need to act quickly to respond to and mitigate a situation, and they almost always involve guidance and expertise from the CDC or the Ohio Department of Health.

A critical change in local authority of this magnitude deserves thoughtful consideration that includes public testimony and discussion with local government officials and the public. These provisions prohibit the issuance of local isolation and quarantine orders and other public health mitigation strategies, even if there is an immediate threat to public health and safety, and they will have consequences beyond this current pandemic.

Thank you for your consideration of our opposition, and we ask that you veto Senate Bill 22.

Sincerely,



Kevin L. Boyce, Board President, Franklin County Board of Commissioners



Marilyn Brown, Commissioner, Franklin County Board of Commissioners



John O'Grady, Commissioner, Franklin County Board of Commissioners

Commissioners

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