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Serving the 18th House
District

(part) Franklin County

Committees:

Insurance- Ranking Member
Joint Committee on Agency Rule
Review
Joint Legislative Ethics Committee
Public Utilities
Rules & Reference

Assistant Minority Leader Kristin Boggs
State Representative

May 19, 2020

Speaker Householder,

On behalf of the House Democratic Caucus, I write today to once again share the concern of our caucus related to the safety of our members, staff, media, law enforcement and constituents as we conduct the People's work at the Ohio House of Representatives.

In our previous letter sent May 13, our caucus expressed disappointment with your unilateral decision to loosen safety protocols that we had not learned about until only a couple hours prior to the House session. Also of concern is that the safety of our committee rooms has been left up to the individual chairs and as a result, a patchwork of protocols that differ room to room is causing confusion, chaos and anxiety.

Ohioans have been instructed to share workplace violations with their local health department and so I filed a complaint with the Columbus Health Department. I cited a violation of mass gatherings, failure to require staff to wear face coverings, and failure to maintain six-foot social distancing. When we saw Rep. Skindell's HR 342 on the agenda in Rules and Reference Committee today, we were encouraged that would be the first step to making necessary adjustments in protocol to keep us safe. But instead, the resolution was killed and no changes have been made. This is power politics at its worst.

However, House Democrats will not be deterred. Being one of the first workplaces in the state to return following the Stay At Home Order carries with it a bit of pressure to get it right. As elected officials, we have an obligation to lead by example. We remain concerned with the example we are setting for our fellow Ohioans. In fact, when I spoke to the Columbus Health Department, they told me several of the employers who are being reported as violating the recommendations have pointed to the Ohio House of Representatives as their touchstone. We must do better, Mister Speaker. People are looking to us to lead.

In state legislatures all over the country, extraordinary measures have been taken in response to these extraordinary times. In Delaware, the statehouse remains closed to the public and committees and sessions are being held virtually. The House of

Representatives in Alabama and Louisiana have installed plexiglass partitions to aid social distancing on the House floor. In Hawaii, temperature checks are being conducted before anyone enters the building.

After looking to other states for ideas and speaking to various stakeholders in Ohio, we have compiled a short list of common sense best practices that we would like to see applied to committee rooms and the House chambers immediately:

- A requirement that all members and staff wear masks within the Statehouse walls
- Plexiglass barriers installed in the House chambers and disinfected before and after session
- Disinfecting wipes and hand sanitizer at each podium in the committee rooms
- A safe distance surrounding each podium in the committee rooms

House Democrats support coming back to work to pass meaningful legislation to benefit everyday Ohioans affected by COVID-19, but returning simply to vote on evergreen issues with no relevance to the crisis and without commonsense safety measures in place while we conduct this business threatens the health and safety of all of us. Please work with us, Mister Speaker, to set the best example possible for our fellow Ohioans.

Sincerely,



Kristin Boggs
Ohio House Assistant Minority Leader
Representative, District 18