June 22, 2018

Dear Public Health Stakeholder,

As you may know, new and existing laws and regulations can unintentionally affect the health of citizens whose lives are most touched by these policies. That is why I am pleased to announce the introduction of an important piece of legislation initiated by the Ohio Public Health Association and sponsored by Ohio State Senator Charleta B. Tavares (D-Columbus).

Sen. Tavares recently introduced Senate Bill 302, the Health and Equity in All Policies (HEiAP) Initiative, which seeks to create a standardized, systematic review process for determining potential impact of proposed legislation on the health of Ohioans. The bill calls for a health and equity impact analysis at the early stages of policy development and is meant to inform Ohio lawmakers of any potential negative health and equity consequences.

The analysis would additionally help lawmakers identify those populations most susceptible to unfavorable health outcomes from any proposed legislation. Further, the review would allow legislators to consider how proposed bills would impact the population’s health through other health influences such as water and air quality, access to public transportation, social services, food security, education and good jobs.

For example, creating new roads or highways might reduce traffic congestion, but may also create the unintended consequence of reducing the navigability of families to access healthy foods, public transportation, schools, and employment. Relaxing zoning and construction laws may attract more businesses, but it might also negatively impact the air and water quality of certain neighborhoods. Health implications can touch a broad range of policies and this legislation provides lawmakers with a tool for informed decision-making.

It is well documented that Ohio consistently falls in the bottom quartile in most national health rankings and this trend continues despite our best efforts to improve health outcomes. According to a recent study conducted by the Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO), Ohio ranks 47th nationally on a composite measure of health value. OPHA is fully committed to working toward the improvement of health and the reduction in health disparities for all Ohioans.

We believe there is precedent for the creation of such a legislative review process. Ohio’s Common-Sense Initiative (CSI) requires all relevant rules and regulations from cabinet-level agencies and state boards and commissions to be reviewed to “balance the goals of the regulation with the costs for businesses to comply.” Incorporating Health and Equity in All
Policies into the legislative process would provide the same public health protections as those enjoyed by businesses through the CSI.

We sincerely believe this legislation could be one of the most important Public Health policies to have been considered in Ohio in many years. And, if enacted, this legislation could be a significant factor in turning around both our poor health rankings and the inequities that exist among our fellow citizens.

OPHA would like your support and endorsement as we work to build a statewide coalition of partners and supporters to help in the passage of this important legislation. Working together with multiple partners is a key component of this initiative and we would like to add your organization to the list of stakeholders that we will inform, educate and collaborate with throughout this process.

Please consider joining this effort by signing and returning the enclosed letter of support and your organization will be added to the list of supporters. As a supporter, you will be informed of committee hearings and provided updates. While S.B. 302 is a non-partisan bill, we fully understand that some organizations are unable to take a position on proposed legislation. In those cases, you may indicate whether you would like to be kept updated on the legislation for informational purposes.

Your involvement is critical to our success and to improving the health outcomes and inequality experienced by our fellow Ohioans. To view the bill and for more information, please visit our website at: https://ohiopha.org/about-opha/sections-and-subjects/heiap/

Respectfully,

Joe Ebel, RS, MS, MBA
President
Ohio Public Health Association