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OHIO HOUSE GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN SHANE WILKIN

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Hope A. Lane, Public Policy Associate

Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chairwoman White, Ranking Member Sweeney and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 55. My name is Hope Lane and I am a Policy Associate at The Center for Community Solutions, a nonprofit, nonpartisan think-tank that aims to improve health, social and economic conditions through research, policy analysis and communications and advocacy.

For the past several budget cycles, Community Solutions has advocated for improved data, information sharing and transparency across public agencies and beyond as we believe it is incredibly difficult to identify gaps and deliberate policy solutions without a precise understanding of the problem. That is what brought me here today.

House Bill 55 creates an opportunity to make Ohio's government more open and accessible for all people. To protect democracy, it is critical that policymakers are informed by the experiences and voices of the Ohioans their decisions will impact and equally critical that Ohioans are not barred from learning about their government and participating in the lawmaking process during such a pivotal time in American history.

We at Community Solutions have spent considerable time tracking the impact of the COVID-19 public health crisis on Ohio's communities and know that public participation in our lawmaking process is more urgent and imperative than ever before.

Much of our work at Community Solutions involves focus groups, key informant interviews, workgroups and other ways to gauge opinions and experiences to conduct research and form policy priorities. Throughout the pandemic we have had to modify our ordinary methods to adapt to a virtual world to ensure our work could continue. Because of this, we know successful economic recovery across all industries is impossible without gathering the facts from those on the front lines and that many mediums exist to do so.

Accessible opportunities for engagement during public hearings and informational forums should adhere to public health guidelines and should not be limited to written only or coming in

person. In addition to the complexities of trying to making accommodations to testify in Columbus during a weekday afternoon, social distancing recommendations remain in place and thus people should not unnecessarily be gathering indoors. However, as long-time advocates of the legislature we know that full participation in the legislative process requires the opportunity for dialogue between committee members and witnesses to ask and respond to questions publicly in real time, thus submitting written testimony should be a last resort.

Since the General Assembly has already had to significantly adjust existing processes due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge support for House Bill 55 to further democratize lawmaking in our state. While changes are important for the short-term as elected officials envision how to legislate during social distancing; we must also use this opportunity to reimagine our legislative process in the future for greater accessibility for all Ohio residents.

I want to thank you again for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony as Community Solutions always values the chance to weigh in on policy that would greatly impact the health and wellbeing of Ohioans. We would welcome the chance to share additional ideas and research we have conducted in this space and are happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

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