



# Missouri Public Health Association

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## **Testimony to the Governor's Task Force on the Corona Virus Missouri Public Health Association April, 2020**

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

This testimony is provided on behalf of the Missouri Public Health Association (MPHA), the largest voluntary public health organization in the state. The membership of the Association includes physicians, nurses, epidemiologists, sanitarians, and public health administrators and practitioners from throughout Missouri. Since 1925, this Association has advocated for a strong public health system to address the myriad of health challenges facing Missouri. The MPHA has been an integral partner in the state as jointly we have faced health crises related to such communicable conditions as polio, smallpox, tuberculosis, Ebola, Zika, SARS, H1N1, Hepatitis A and many other dreaded conditions that have plagued our communities. We have recognized that protecting Missourians from disease, public health emergencies and bioterrorism requires a strong public health system that is focused on prevention, when possible, and mitigation and control, as needed.

It is toward that goal of controlling the current pandemic of COVID-19, that we write to express our serious concerns. It is evident that in the most recent infusion of federal stimulus dollars allocated to Missouri, no allocation was made to the local public health agencies fighting the COVID19 pandemic on our state's front line. HB 2014 that was "Truly Agreed and Finally Passed" earlier this month by the General Assembly allocated millions of dollars to local governments, but no funds went directly to local public health agencies. Our state's independent local public health agencies (they are not affiliates of the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) as sometimes perceived) were told to pursue funding through their local governments. This, despite the evident facts that these governments were already strapped due to significant loss of revenue and tax bases and would need those funds to keep civic government operations solvent. Funds that were allocated to DHSS are being utilized for the purchase of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), the state-run 1-800 hotline for calls related to the Coronavirus, and other infrastructure needs at the state level. Critical needs to support local public health

agencies in the surveillance, testing and epidemiologic investigations surrounding reported cases of COVID-19 are receiving absolutely no direct funds from this stimulus fund.

Missouri's public health system already teeters on the brink of crisis, thereby threatening its capacity to provide essential, foundational public health services in their respective communities to prevent disease, limit or reduce health care costs and promote healthy, thriving communities in which to live, work and play. Compounding this severe financial crisis with a pandemic that threatens all aspects of our society represents a challenge not experienced since the 1918 Flu Epidemic that ravaged the globe. Local public health agency administrators, nurses, and staff report that they have been working unceasingly since COVID19 hit Missouri. They work 80-90 hour weeks with little to no access to PPE. They are harassed by community members who challenge their enforcement of stay-at-home orders. They are exhausted and frustrated with the lack of support from the state. When the state loosens its social distancing restrictions, we expect we will have more cases to manage and more contacts to track down and test. In short, we will be further burdening an already exhausted local public health system.

Missouri already ranks second-to-last in the nation in state general revenue allocated to public health services, appropriating only \$5.88 per capita annually. Now is the time to change that, and financially provide the support local public health needs. We encourage you to act affirmatively and provide the necessary funding to the 115 local public health agencies on the front line so they can do their jobs for all of us. They are our first line of defense, and they desperately need your support.

We urge you to reflect on the motto of the Great State of Missouri, namely, *Salus Populi Suprema Lex Esto*, i.e., The Health of the People is the Supreme Law. Funding your local public health agencies in your communities is, indeed, the right thing to do. When public health wins, we all win.

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Thank you for your attention in this regard.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lynelle Phillips, R.N., M.P.H., Chair  
Public Policy and Advocacy Committee

Bert Malone, M.P.A.  
MPHA Board Member