



# OEHA

OHIO ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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**HB 49 Opponent Testimony  
Ohio Environmental Health Association, Paul DePasquale  
Before the Senate Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee  
Chairman Bob Hackett**

Chairman Hackett, Ranking Member Tavares, and members of the Senate Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee, thank you for allowing me to provide opponent testimony today on House Bill 49. My name is Paul DePasquale, and I am the president of the Ohio Environmental Health Association (OEHA), and Director of Environmental Health at the Stark County Health Department. OEHA's membership includes over 600 public health sanitarians, who are health inspectors in local and state government, colleges and universities, and private industry. OEHA is opposed to a provision contained in the House passed version of HB 49 which abolishes the Ohio State Board of Sanitarian Registration and transfers its duties to the Ohio Department of Health.

For background, the Board of Sanitarian Registration was created in 1977 and has a seven member board composed of the profession and representatives of the Ohio Department of Health and Ohio Environmental Protection Agency with an Executive Secretary to carry out the functions of the board. The Board receives no GRF and is funded by fee revenues. The Board has important functions including administering the mandatory registration requirements establishing both the Registered Sanitarian and Sanitarian-in-Training credential; regulating the practice of environmental health; and, certifying and requiring 18 hours of continuing education annually.

The practice of environmental health requires specialized knowledge, training, and experience in the field of environmental health science. To become a sanitarian, you must have at least a bachelor's degree and have completed a minimum of 45 quarter hours or 30 semester hours in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Geology, Math and/or Statistics; pass the National Environmental Health Association exam; and, complete at least 18 hours of Board approved CE annually. The primary role of Registered Sanitarians and Sanitarians-In-Training is to protect the health of the public by ensuring that the food we eat is safe, water is safe to drink, neighborhoods are free from public health nuisance conditions, and prevent the spread of disease. Collectively, sanitarians, in just one year, inspect over 50,000 food service operations and other types of regulated programs such as campgrounds, swimming pools, body art facilities, landfills, sewage systems, and private water supplies to protect Ohioans from disease, contamination and harm.

The As Passed by the House language abolishes the Sanitarian Registration Board and transfers its duties to the Ohio Department of Health. We are confused why the Board is being abolished when it is currently operating timely in its processing of applications, issuing licenses and renewals, reviewing complaints, and updating professional practice rules for more than 1,400 registrations of the profession in Ohio. The Board performs this work smoothly, efficiently, and within a budget that is funded by registration fees.

The sanitarian profession in Ohio works to enforce statute, rules and other requirements on behalf of the Ohio Department of Health, Ohio Department of Agriculture and Ohio Environmental Protection Agency. The fact that we have multiple “masters” at the state level has created problems over the years, and OEHA has attempted to work through these issues with our state partners. Sometimes this has been successful. Other times it has not. We are currently debating with both ODA and ODH, and have been for over two years, the food survey process which is the state evaluation process of local health district sanitarians on their regulation of food service operations and retail food establishments. Depending on the type of establishment being inspected, local sanitarians are performing this duty on behalf of either ODA or ODH. This divided system reveals problems and inconsistencies between the state agencies and leads to frustration during implementation by local sanitarians who perform these tasks at the local level. HB 65, introduced by Rep. Brian Hill, has been introduced to try to address some of these problems. This debate is ongoing.

I reference this point to say that we understand that no system is perfect. I recognize the R.S. Board is not perfect. I also understand that there are reasons to make changes so government can function more efficiently. However, abolishing the R.S. Board and sending its duties to ODH does not improve any process or make any situation better. The current model of sanitarians performing work on behalf of ODH, ODA, and EPA highlights the importance of the need for an independent entity separate from the cabinet agencies. The creation of the Sanitarian Registration Board in 1977 helped to ensure that standards were created and the profession of Environmental Health had independent, professional oversight. Abolishing the Board effectively eliminates a 40 year track record and proud Ohio success story. Placing these duties in a state agency removes the independent oversight of this critical public health workforce. The simple fact is there is no entity at the state level in Ohio better suited than the non-partisan, independent R.S. Board to handle this duty.

Most people do not realize the importance of sanitarians and the environmental health profession in their daily lives until a problem arises. It’s hard to measure how many disease outbreaks and deaths are prevented by sanitarians. The biggest flaw with the existing State Board of Sanitarian Registration is that it does not have regulatory oversight over any environmental health programs enforced by sanitarians. Instead of a divided system of programs split among multiple “masters” like we have today, we have researched and even drafted language to place the responsibility of all of these programs with the Board under a model similar to how the Medical Board operates. This would provide a single “home” for environmental health at the state level which would provide competent governance from a capable Board with members from the profession. However, this is a detailed change that requires thorough vetting. As such it would be impractical to try to force this prematurely in the budget.

The point is that OEHA is open to discussion with the General Assembly on how to best address governing the practice of environmental health in Ohio moving forward as we have already been developing ideas on how to do so. But today, we encourage the Senate to restore the as introduced version of HB 49 which continues the operation of the State Board of Sanitarian Registration. Let’s work on a long term solution together.

Once again, Chairman Hackett and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today. At this time I am available to answer any questions the committee may have.