

Written Testimony:

Good afternoon, my name is Joanne Koterwas and I am a resident of Calvert County. I come to you with a Bachelor's Degree in Community Health Education, Master's in Health Administration and an Advanced Graduate Certificate in Healthcare Leadership. I have worked as an outcomes analyst for St. Mary's and Calvert hospitals. However, for most of my working life I have run my husband's two orthodontic practices where we have over 1200 active patients in St. Mary's and Calvert Counties.

I am not involved in politics, nor do I want to be. My primary focus is providing the highest quality care to our patients. This involves providing a safe dental visit for every person who walks through our doors. Which brings me to why I am speaking to you.

Healthcare providers are interconnected in ways outsiders might not understand. Our Health Departments in both Calvert and St. Mary's Counties got ME through the pandemic so I could get my family, staff and patients through. It was my Health Officer's weekly emails and availability to pick up the phone for support. The PPE distributed and data provided. The Health Officer made it possible for all of my staff to be vaccinated IN OUR OFFICE. During a 2 minute speech I can't possibly tell you all the ways the Health Officer supported our practices.

Which brings me to my purpose here today. Two counties in our state called for the removal of their Health Officers. The Maryland Secretary of Health approves the Health Officer, they are ultimately appointed and fired by County Commissioners. In my two counties the boards are comprised of 5 men of the same political party, voted into to office with at-large voting who do not have to answer for the reasoning behind their decisions. When they moved to fire our Health Officer they did so behind closed doors and without consulting the medical community. How do we provide stability, communication, innovation in operations, information systems and data collection when a person is abruptly removed without cause? Particularly during a pandemic that is a moving target? The answer: You can't.

It is not lost on anyone in this room that we are amid perhaps the most politically polarized time in our Nation's history. Front and center are masks, vaccines, and the pandemic. But wait! The Health Officer is not just overseeing and directing the pandemic response. Also within their purview are community health education, women's health, nursing homes, well and septic education, smoking cessation to name a few. In my county our Health Officer has created a Mobile Crisis Team charged with accompanying first responders on calls for overdose or mental health crisis. As a result, Calvert County has had the largest drop in overdose deaths in the last three years in the entire state of Maryland. This is nothing short of remarkable as our overdose rates, once higher than the state average, are now 40% less than the State average.

It is vital that the decision to fire a Health Officer be made based on the performance of the person in all aspects of responsibility, not on a politically charged, hot-button topic of the moment. By supporting SB548 you are providing stability, continuity of care and guidelines for removal rather than leaving our public health and safety to the whims of 5 people behind

closed doors. Thank you for your time, please pass SB548 out of committee with a favorable report.

Oral Testimony:

Good afternoon, my name is Joanne Koterwas and I am a resident of Calvert County. I come to you with a bachelor's degree in Community Health Education, Master's in Health Administration, and an Advanced Graduate Certificate in Healthcare Leadership. I have worked as an outcomes analyst for St. Mary's and Calvert hospitals. However, for most of my working life I have run my husband's two orthodontic practices where we have over 1200 active patients in St. Mary's and Calvert Counties.

Healthcare providers are interconnected in ways outsiders might not understand. Our Health Departments in both Calvert and St. Mary's Counties got ME through the pandemic so I could get my family, staff, and patients through. My Health Officer provided weekly emails and availability to pick up the phone for support. He oversaw PPE distribution and made it possible for all my staff to be vaccinated IN OUR OFFICE. In both counties the Health Officers orchestrated a coordinated response to a politically divisive virus and did so while leaning into science making hard calls that were not always popular.

In my two counties the Board of Commissioners are comprised of 5 men of the same political party, voted into to office with at-large voting who do not have to answer for the reasoning behind their decisions. When they moved to fire our Health Officer they did so behind closed doors and without consulting the medical community. How do we provide stability, communication, innovation in operations, information systems and data collection when a person is abruptly removed without cause? Particularly during a pandemic that is a moving target? The answer: You can't.

The pandemic has put masks, vaccines, and personal liberties front and center. But wait! The Health Officer is not just overseeing and directing the pandemic response. Also within their purview are community health education, women's health, nursing homes, well and septic education, smoking cessation to name a few. My county's Health Officer has created a Mobile Crisis Team charged with accompanying first responders on calls for overdose or mental health crisis. As a result, Calvert County has had the largest drop in overdose deaths in the last three years in the entire state of Maryland. This is nothing short of remarkable as our overdose rates, once higher than the state average, are now 40% less than the State average.

It is vital that the decision to fire a Health Officer be made based on the performance of the person in all aspects of responsibility, not on a politically charged, hot-button topic of the moment. By supporting SB548 you are providing stability, continuity of care and guidelines for removal rather than leaving our public health and safety to the whims of 5 people behind closed doors. Thank you for your time, please pass SB548 out of committee with a favorable report.