



January 13, 2021

RE: Opposition HB 121

Dear House Local Government Committee:

My name is Vicky Byrd, MSN, RN. I am a Registered Nurse and the CEO of the Montana Nurses Association (MNA). MNA is the recognized leader and advocate for the professional nurse in Montana. MNA promotes professional nursing practice, standards, and education; represents professional nurses; and provides nursing leadership in promoting high quality healthcare and overall public health.

MNA opposes Representative Bedey HB 121 for the following reasons.

Montana has a de-centralized public health system provided by the Montana Legislature in 2007. This system allows for **local control** over **local decisions** in the health realm. Local control is value held by most Montanans. Local boards of Health are selected by locally elected leaders, to make decisions to improve and meet our communities' specific health priorities, Montana Code Annotated 50-2-104. As nurses our commitment is to the patient, whether an individual, family, group, community, or population. Local Health Boards have the health professionals' expertise to make decisions for the community. If you have cancer you go to an oncologist, not your local lawmaker. County or City Commissioners do not have the healthcare knowledge, nor the expertise and should not be making these types of healthcare decisions especially through a political lens.

Local Boards of Health must have a minimum of five members and they are **appointed by the county and/or city commissioners** to serve three-year staggered terms. Membership is chosen from the local community understanding the local needs and often includes county commission representation plus two additional appointees. These appointees focus must be public health as the communities and the population they serve is their patient. The liability of other than a public health expert making public health orders without public health evidence and guidance from public health professionals compromises the health of that community. Additional appointees include health professionals, school officials, and others with expertise in public health. The latter serve at the will of the elected officials. As per 50-2-104, board members serve three-year terms.

We all need to take a breath...Montana is in the midst of a global pandemic. **Do not change Montana's public health laws that have worked well since they were legislated in 2007.** Determine if there is need for these sweeping changes after the COVID dust settles. If these needs still exist, consider the 2023 session as the time to make these changes. Let our local public health focus on vaccine distribution, contact tracing, and local health delivery. **NOW, IS NOT THE TIME TO MAKE THESE CHANGES!**

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