

Jenny Hughes
Wood County
Testimony for Sub. HB 115

Chairman Coley, Vice chair Uecker, Ranking member Schiavoni and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, my name is Jenny Hughes and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Substitute House Bill 115.

I am here to ask for your support of House Bill 115. This bill will establish a voluntary database of people who are verified by a doctor as someone who has a communication disability. It will allow parents and guardians of such persons to register them for the purpose of law enforcement notification.

This would discreetly notify officers of possible medical conditions such as: autism, PTSD, hearing impaired, dementia, etc.; BEFORE approaching the vehicle. This registry would be included in the LEADS program available to law-enforcement to notify them of possible interactions with individuals that have a medical condition or disability that may cause them to appear impaired. This would be possible by giving drivers and car owners the ability to voluntarily disclose medical information on their license registration. This would allow the information to be readily available for officers before approaching a vehicle, which could save time and lives.

My husband and I have two adult sons that live with autism. Our oldest son Jay is 24 years old, he has defied all the predictions doctors gave us. Jay holds a job as well as a driver's license. He loves art, PS4, Comic Con and Renaissance fair's. Jay is quite the jokester! He has a kind heart and is always ready to help someone. However, Jay is 6 feet tall and 250 pounds, and may have difficulty expressing himself appropriately to authorities, because of his communication skills. He may start crying, become agitated, or he may appear to be impaired when talking. These behaviors could cause undue suspicion, which could be avoided if the officer had all the information before approaching the vehicle.

Gabe, our youngest son, is 22 years old and is nonverbal. Gabe would be considered severe on the autism spectrum. He is a hard worker, and has a job at Bittersweet Farms in Whitehouse, Ohio. Gabe enjoys physical jobs, working with animals, being outside and of course anything Disney.

I am concerned that if I were to be stopped by a police officer with Gabriel in the car, the wrong conclusion maybe drawn when my license plate is ran through the law enforcement agency data system (LEADS) and is pinged because I have a carrying concealed weapons permit. My car is stopped, from behind the officer sees a grown man moving around. That grown man would be my 22-year-old son rocking back-and-forth, because the police lights and the sudden change overstimulate him in his routine. An officer at this point would not know that they could be interacting with a person who has a disability. The officer may feel threatened and think that this man could be going for my gun because of my CCW permit. Understandably, their first instinct would be to protect themselves and to keep the situation from escalating. I support House Bill 115 because I support law-enforcement and giving them every tool to do their job as effectively

as possible. I believe House Bill 115 will help police identify particular situations, and hope to increase the safety of citizens as well as officers.

I ask for your support for House Bill 115 because every parent plans to raise their child for 18 years and set them free. They hope their child will one day come back to help them finish out their own final years. The special-needs parents plan to raise their child for the duration of their own life and while doing so must prepare for the other 20 years or so after they themselves have gone. I believe House Bill 115 is a start in keeping the special needs community safe.

While one in every 68 people live with autism, this is not just about autism; this would cover Veterans like Mr. Ralph Weiland, a retired medic for the US Army from 1968 to 1970. He also retired from the department of Veterans Affairs, as a team leader, supervisor and therapist. Mr. Weiland, along with his daughter Holly wrote a letter of support because they believe veterans who suffer from PTSD would benefit from House Bill 115 because communication issues can be triggered during high anxiety situations, such as a traffic stops. PTSD affects 12 out of every 100 Veterans.

I ask for your support of House Bill 115 for my dear friend Mark Sommer who at age 50 was diagnosed with Parkinson's and wrote a letter of support, stating misunderstandings and some symptoms associated with Parkinson's may be misinterpreted as an individual being intoxicated.

I ask for your support of House Bill 115 for the hearing-impaired community as well. I spoke to two young women who wrote letters of support. One is Isabelle Knestrick, whose brother Cory is hearing impaired and had a bad interaction during a traffic stop when an officer ordered him out of the vehicle. Cory was thrown to the ground when he did not follow commands because he did not hear them. Another young woman wrote a letter of support just two days after a car accident when the officer was left bewildered when his questions were not answered.

I ask for your support for my friends Martin and Melissa Ramirez whose son is part of the Downs Syndrome community.

I could stand up here and go on and on, but the reality is someone with a communication disability likely affects every single one of us in here, either directly or indirectly. It is our job to keep the ones we care about safe.

I support House Bill 115 because a disability does not define a person. This bill will help the identified individuals keep their independence and give them the ability to communicate to law-enforcement. This will help the disabled community because there will be no identifying marks on their license or license plate that could potentially lead to discrimination or harm to the affected person.

I ask for your support of House Bill 115 for my children, Jay and Gabriel Castro.

Chairman Coley, thank you for allowing me time to speak and I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.