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Proponent Testimony, Ohio House Bill 12
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Chairman Merrin, Vice-Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Boyd and Members of the House Health Committee: Thank you for this opportunity to offer proponent testimony regarding Ohio House Bill 12, which would create the Ohio Children's Behavioral Health Prevention Network Stakeholder Group.

Across the country, mental and behavioral health issues among children and adolescents have been on the rise for a number of years, putting the future of the next generation of Ohioans at risk. Estimates show that more than 30% of adolescents in Ohio experience depression each year. Even more concerning is the number of adolescents in the state who report having suicidal thoughts, which is roughly 17% annually. We also know that one in five children are currently living with mental or behavioral health issues, and experts estimate approximately 50% of all lifetime mental health issues begin by age 14. Left unaddressed, these alarming trends have the potential to deprive Ohio's youth of their chance at leading healthy, productive lives.

As a result, Akron Children's Hospital has invested heavily in our behavioral health facilities in recent years to expand our capacity for diagnosing and treating emotional disorders affecting children and teens. Families who come to our hospital are able to access a variety of services for their children, ranging from partial hospitalization to intensive outpatient care, medication management, psychological testing through our Psychiatric Intake Response Center (PIRC) and universal screening for youth depression in our primary care practices. We are committed to continuing to invest in mental health services to meet community needs and recently partnered with the Ohio Department of Health to spearhead a suicide prevention effort targeting youth across Summit County.

To further support all of these efforts, we believe HB 12 offers a number of opportunities to strengthen Ohio's behavioral health network and improve access to this vital care. HB 12 allows children's hospitals across the state to coordinate with other primary care practices, social service agencies and, importantly, local schools, where we have already established a partnership to care for children through our School Health Program. If passed, the bill would permit stakeholders across Ohio to participate in a comprehensive learning network to support young children and their families. This bill would allow Ohio's children's hospitals to begin building a coordinated network of services and ensure every child in our state has access to the social, emotional and behavioral support they need to develop to their full potential.

Thank you for this opportunity to express our support for HB 12. We believe providing these critical behavioral health resources will help ensure the future of Ohio and its children.