

Regina Costantino, PhD, LSW
Behavior Support Specialist
The Elyria Schools
42101 Griswold Road
Elyria, OH 44035

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Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the committee:

I am writing to support Senate Bill 126, specifically the proposed language changes that will expand Ohio Revised Code 5122.04 to include allowing crisis assessments for children under age 14.

As an educator and mental health professional in Lorain County, I am aware that staff in the educational domain are well-trained to recognize warning signs of at-risk students. The Elyria Schools outline procedures to follow for safety. Procedures include contacting community resources to request emergency mental health assessments. Lorain County's Emergency Stabilization Services at The Nord Center has, for decades, provided consultation and emergency assessments that evaluate safety/risk, and level of care. Their mobility allows them to go to schools, homes, hospitals, and other community locations.

Though resources are available, Ohio legislation requires parental consent for a child under 14 years of age to have a mental health assessment. This restricts access to resources for education professionals to use to protect the safety of students who have reported suicidal thoughts/plans/intentions. Many times, parents of students do not have a working phone number, do not answer, do not return calls, or do not give consent to involve mental health services, even when a team of professionals (teacher, counselor, administrator, others) has attempted to explain the imminence of the situation.

There is a critical need to provide greater mental health support to our youth. According to the Ohio Department of Health, "Suicide deaths increased by 56% among youth ages 10 - 24 from 2007 - 2018." The updated language in Senate Bill 126 will support children under age 14 so they are not denied a mental health assessment in an emergency because parental consent has not been obtained. This is an important step because The Ohio Department of Health reported that "Suicide is the leading cause of death among Ohioans ages 10 - 14."

Thank you for considering the statistics and information in this letter. This is an important opportunity to support the mental health needs of children in crisis. It is imperative that legislation authorizes supervising adults to obtain emergency professional mental health assessments for children under their care who they believe to be suicidal, when parental consent is unavailable.

Sincerely,

Regina Costantino PhD LSW

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