



February 19, 2020

Addressed to Dave Burke, Chair, Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee of The Ohio Senate.

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

My name is Michael Eppley and I am a resident of Lorain County. I am providing written testimony in support of SB 126, specifically for the proposed language changes that will expand Ohio Revised Code 5122.04 to include children under age 14, who are now dying by suicide at double the rate they did a decade ago.

I personally know the pain of losing a child to suicide, my son Jonathan took his life almost seven years ago and I am now an advocate for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention through my work as Executive Director of NAMI Lorain County and the LOSS (Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors) Team of Lorain County. In the past ten years suicide among local middle school, and high school students has increased dramatically. The school where my children attended is a rural school district and suicide was unheard of several decades ago but now it and other surrounding districts experience suicide by middle school aged children far too often. I believe our local schools are losing children to suicide at rates greater than those lost to automobile accidents and drug overdoses which are often believed to be the greatest threat to our youth. It is time we acknowledge this threat and take appropriate action to do all we can to protect children who are at risk. I do not want any other parent to have to experience the pain that I had to experience when I lost my son to suicide.

Suicide is now the leading cause of death among Ohioans ages 10-14. A report released in November from the Ohio Department of Health that showed that suicide deaths increased by 56% among Ohio youth ages 10-24 between 2007-2018, and is the leading cause of death among Ohioans ages 10-14 and the second leading cause of death among Ohioans ages 15-34.

I support expanding Ohio Revised Code 5122.04 to allow for children younger than 14 who may be suicidal to receive a crisis risk assessment, even if parents are not immediately available to provide consent. The proposed update keeps the important language for youth ages 14 and older, and also allows for a crisis assessment for younger children when there is evidence that the child may be suicidal. The child's safety and well-being can be assessed by a professional while the professional continues to make a good-faith effort to connect with the parent or guardian.

We cannot wait to respond to a child in crisis. Also, Ohio cannot wait to address a trend of younger people dying by suicide. SB 126 updates the ORC to make it possible to save younger lives.

Thank you for considering my testimony today.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael D. Eppley".

Michael D. Eppley

Executive Director NAMI Lorain County

“Be Stigma Free” Raise Awareness

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A Member of the Mental Health Network of Lorain County