

Good Morning, Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio, and all members of the Health Committee, my name is Bob Tavani. Thank you for having me here today, I am here to testify in support of House Bill 557 and explain some examples of how art therapy has had a positive impact on many individuals and why licensure is important for the art therapy industry in Ohio. I am a Registered Art Therapist here in Columbus. I'm employed by Columbus Area Integrated Health Services, Inc. where I have worked as an art therapist and employment specialist for nine years. And, I am an adjunct faculty member at Capital University where I have taught art therapy and fine art courses for the past four years. Notably, this semester I am directing an internship entitled Art in the City at Broad Street United Methodist Church. This art therapy group is open to those that are experiencing homelessness and other challenges.

I have brought some examples of artwork and want to share the stories behind them. The artworks I'll show you today are by one of the attendees in the Art in the City group. I'll refer to this person as K.C. Before becoming homeless, K.C. held a middle management position at a well-known retailer. When the retailer cut positions, he was one of the last to be let go. After this, K.C. experienced a relapse in substance abuse. He was unable to find a position that would meet his monthly bills and when he did have a favorable interview, he then tested positive for drug use. When unemployment benefits ran dry, he was unable to pay rent and was evicted. K.C. began attending this group in January and has returned several times. The first time he attended, he appeared tired and attributed his appearance to living in a homeless shelter. His demeanor was guarded and in group, he began drawing independently. K.C.'s first drawing shows him in the shelter. He compared it to an unpredictable sea of people. "You never know what's going to happen there", he said. I asked K.C. if he had been linked with services through the shelter. He was linked with a Housing Navigator but not a counselor. K.C. said he heard about the Art in the City group by attending the Manna Dinner at Broad Street Methodist Church. He had forgotten that he loved to draw when he was young. I asked, "What did you love about it"? "Maybe it was a nice escape from my mom", he said. He said that the shelter reminded him of his childhood because his parents were alcoholics and his mom could be unpredictably violent. K.C. is estranged from his family. Currently, he does not have a significant other and has no children of his own.

During K.C.'s second day in group, we reflected on his first drawing. He was still living in the shelter and I asked him what change would make his life there more predictable and stable. He reported that he was still worried about the "unexpected" and that these worries wore on him. In this drawing you can see that he began to organize the space in a way to add personal safety and predictability. K.C. drew a partition and added a door with a locking mechanism of sorts. He shared that he wished he had his own room growing up and was able to lock-out his mother when she was intoxicated. When his mom was intoxicated, she would often startle him awake by grabbing him or screaming at him. Things then would often escalate. He was often beaten and learned to "take it" because he felt he could not retreat to a safe place. K.C. and I discussed how artmaking can make our histories more visible and he realized that his childhood experiences were influencing his current feelings about living in the shelter and that by being hyper-vigilant he might be overlooking resources and friendships that were available to him.

For his third drawing, I asked K.C. to imagine being in the shelter without his personal history of childhood abuse and trauma. I asked, "Do you think you would function differently?" We reflected on

how personal histories seep into present day life and that can be especially pronounced with trauma. K.C. became a bit frustrated by this directive and said it would be a denial of who he is. We talked about “change” and what it takes to break old habits or an ingrained self-image. I reminded K.C. that at this point, the “change” would be limited to the safe space of his drawing. He agreed to try. In this drawing there are multiple K.C.s. One is talking to a housing navigator, another K.C. is socializing with a potential friend, and the third one is drawing amongst the “unpredictable sea of people”.

I’m happy to report that K.C. is still attending the group and he is now linked with a counselor. He has moved into a group home and has a part-time job at a retailer similar to the one in which he was a middle-manager. He is more relaxed and smiles and told me he has made a couple friends and is less worried about the “unpredictable”. He continues to make drawings as a form of visualization and self-realization. “I’m glad I started drawing again”, he said. “I always liked art but didn’t know it could help me change. Now, I tell everyone that using your imagination can be really therapeutic”. Art Therapy provides a multitude of benefits for individuals with substance use disorders, such as opioid addiction. In this case, Art Therapy reminded K.C. of happier times, and provided him a private way to address change. “At first”, he said, “I never would have told anybody about my issues. But now that they’re on paper, it makes communicating with my counselor so much easier.”

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee I want to thank you again for allowing me to testify today in support of House Bill 557. I believe Art Therapy has a very important place in helping struggling individuals cope and recover from very difficult circumstances, just like K.C. Licensure for Art Therapy will bring clarity and more importantly recognition and increased awareness of this profession to those who may benefit from it but are not aware it is an option for them. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have at this time.