



**State Representative Marlene Anielski**  
**Ohio House District 6**

Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Senate Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today on an important piece of legislation for Ohio's youth. House Bill 502 is a modification to House Bill 543 which passed in the 129<sup>th</sup> GA and became law in 2013. The current law is officially entitled the "Jason Flatt Act – in honor of Joseph Anielski." The law requires each public K-12<sup>th</sup> grade school board to incorporate youth suicide awareness and prevention training into the EXISTING in-service training requirements. The training is for a person who is employed by any school district or educational service center that works in a school as a nurse, teacher, counselor, school psychologist or administrator and any other personnel that the board determines appropriate.

I would like to give some background on the Jason Flatt Act. Clark Flatt, Jason's father, founded The Jason Foundation, Inc. (JFI) to help bring public awareness to the "Silent Epidemic" and to help provide information, tools and resources for students, educators, youth workers and parents in suicide prevention and awareness. The Jason Foundation offers its curriculum **FREE** to the state and school districts which has no fiscal impact to either the state or school districts.

In the 129<sup>th</sup> GA in developing and passing the legislation, I sought input from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), the Ohio School Board Association (OSBA), school superintendents, principals, teachers, parents, Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, The Jason Flatt Foundation, Ohio School Counselors Association (OSCA) and other behavioral health organizations. During the process, it was brought to my attention that there are several not-for-profit groups that offer awareness and prevention training curriculum **FREE** of charge for the education community already. Under the Jason Flatt Act, all of these programs, like Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, LifeAct and many other organizations are viable options for the schools or enables the school districts to develop their own programs. It is important that during these difficult fiscal times, we do not create unfunded mandates or mandate additional hours of training for our schools and personnel. It was my goal to provide flexibility to the school boards to implement the training programs and choose the programs that best fits their needs. It is important to note that the bill works

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within the parameters of the current Continuing Education Units (CEUs) and does not add any additional hours to the preexisting requirements.

Sadly, as I call it “The Youth Silent Epidemic” is one of the leading causes of death in our children. Suicide is an important public health issue involving psychological, biological, and societal factors which, at times, can be preventable with treatable behavioral health care. After a period of nearly consistent decline in suicide rates in the United States from 1986 through 1999, suicide rates have increased almost steadily from 1999 through 2017. In Ohio, it is one of the leading causes of deaths in children ages 10-14, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death in youth ages 12-18. More than twice as many people die by suicide in Ohio than homicides. What do we hear most about, HOMICIDES. We must do something to help our children who are suffering in silence. We need to show a meaningful expression of care to all of our children. Empowering our dedicated professionals working with our youth to recognize the signs and symptoms of students that may be at-risk is an important step in stopping the epidemic. Education and awareness can reduce the stigma often associated with depression and mental health issues. Proper prevention education will encourage our youth to seek help and discuss their feelings before it is too late. It also reduces the stigma for families that have experienced the loss of a loved one.

House Bill 502 makes one change and one change only in the existing Jason Flatt Act. In lines 53 to 55 of HB 502, the change is that the school personnel shall take the suicide prevention and awareness training once every two years instead of every five years.

The 2010 and 2017 Ohio data and current trends indicate that all aged suicides have increased from 1,420 to 1,650 respectively, a 16% increase. The Ohio figures are higher than the national average. Plus, these numbers are understated because of the stigma. Therefore, as a state, we are losing every single day, 365 days a year, nearly 5 people that die by suicide or one person dies every 5 hours.

Chair Lehner and members of the committee, thank you for your time and I look forward to answering any questions that you may have this afternoon on House Bill 502, designed for in service training for public school educators about youth suicide awareness and prevention.

