

JUDGE ELINORE MARSH STORMER

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**Proponent Testimony on H.B. 464
House Civil Justice Committee**

Chair Hambley, Vice Chair Patton, Ranking Member Brown, and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, I sincerely appreciate the chance to ask for your vote in favor of an amendment to House Bill 464 allowing advanced practice nurse practitioners to testify in civil commitment cases.

I am Judge Elinore Marsh Stormer of the Summit County Probate Court. Since 1995, I have been working in my judicial capacity to keep jail beds available for violent and anti-social offenders and to move those for whom treatment makes the most sense into less expensive treatment facilities. I helped start the first drug court, mental health court and reentry courts in my county. Each measurably succeeded in reducing jail bed days and in markedly decreasing new crime. Similar courts now flourish across our state.

Another effective way to keep mentally ill persons from our jails is through civil commitment and out patient treatment. As Probate judges, we are not part of the criminal system but are responsible for the **civil** commitment of seriously mentally ill citizens to hospitals and treatment.

Civil commitment usually takes place when a first responder brings a person to a hospital. Those with a mental illness have the right to a hearing at which only certain people can testify as to their need for treatment. After evaluation, these professionals are allowed by statute to testify that the patient is a danger to themselves or others and requires a forced hospital stay or as we say, is “civilly committed” or “probated” to the mental health board. The first commitment period is up to 90 days, but extensions are allowed after hearings and additional testimony.

Two years ago, in H.B. 111 of the 132nd General Assembly, effective 9-28-2018, Ohio allowed advanced practice nurses to initiate emergency hospitalization aka pink-slipping which begins the civil commitment process. The law was important because the number of psychiatrists who practice in hospital and community settings has dropped substantially. Frankly, there were not enough doctors available to work through the initial process so mentally ill people were simply being returned to the streets.

Sadly, there are still not enough psychiatrists, and community treatment centers now rely heavily on specially trained advanced practice nurses to work under physician supervision directly with patients. Psychiatric nurse practitioners have taken a huge burden off the doctors allowing them to focus on the medical aspects of treatment.

A proposed amendment to H.B. 464 would permit those specially trained nurses to testify at civil commitment hearings both in the initial phase and at extension hearings. Recently, in Summit County, we had to cancel extension hearings because there were **no doctors available** to testify. This is both a due process concern as well as a treatment concern.

Summit County is not unique. The shortage of psychiatrists exists throughout Ohio, especially in rural areas. Every county benefits from this change permitting certain qualified advanced practice nurses to testify. Thus, both the Ohio Probate Judges Association and the Ohio Judicial conference support the addition of this amendment and passage of this bill.

I ask that you vote for this proposal to help the many citizens and their families struggling with a serious mental illness. I am available to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elinore Marsh Stormer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "E".

Judge Elinore Marsh Stormer