



Senate Judiciary Committee

Proponent Testimony HB 1

12/9/2020

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony on HB 1. I am Kelly Smith, the State Program and Policy Director for the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition (MHAC). The MHAC is a statewide member organization actively advocating to increase awareness and advance policies to improve the lives of those impacted by mental illnesses and addiction disorders. The MHAC's membership includes approximately 120 organizations whose members exemplify the diversity of community organizations that have a common interest in behavioral health, including health and human service organizations; the faith-based community; government entities; advocacy organizations; courts; major medical institutions; the corporate arena; and behavioral health agencies serving adults and children.

HB 1 is a step forward in improving current criminal justice reforms that aim to help Ohioans by expanding Intervention in Lieu (ILL) of conviction treatment programs and sealing records of low-level, non-violent, non-sexual, fourth and fifth-degree felonies. The MHAC supports these efforts hoping that it will help more individuals with substance use disorders access the behavioral health treatment system rather than the criminal justice system that was never intended to support the needs of behavioral health disorders. The proposed law would presume eligibility for the ILL program following a behavioral health assessment unless a judge determines the defendant is not a candidate. Expanding ILL will ensure more Ohioans are connected to treatment first to begin the recovery process.

The MHAC also supports the second piece of the bill to seal conviction records. An essential component to recovery is employment, but often people with felony convictions face barriers to finding gainful employment. The system in place is not built to restore individuals with criminal justice involvement even if tied to a chronic disease such as substance use disorder. The current system leads to a revolving door in and out of the criminal justice system and may lead to a tragic circle of relapse, arrest, and possible death.

The legislation signals that there is an understanding to provide more meaningful ways to help those with substance use disorders to regain their health and become a contributing member of society. This legislation is complementary to SB 3 and together will create a more just system and public safety.

Please reach out with any questions.