

Testimony on HB 281 on Importance of Person First Language
To Ohio House Committee on Tuesday, May 25th
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Distinguished Members of the Ohio House of Representatives.

I appreciate the opportunity of testify regarding the use of Person First language in any legislation or reference to people with disabilities in the Ohio Revised Code and Constitution.

The current request submitted by Katherine Yoder on January 21, 2021 specifically addresses the language by which we talk about individuals with disabilities, not services available or their treatment. The language that guides our state is important. Historically, people with disabilities have been pitied, marginalized, and removed from society; worse, they have been physically harmed and dehumanized. The current language within the Ohio Constitution and Revised Code support such dehumanization and mistreatment. This language suggests individuals with disabilities in our state are unable to contribute to their communities - that they are less than the rest and unworthy of our respect. When a person is considered less than, unable to contribute, or unworthy, it is likely they will be treated as such.

I strongly support the request submitted by Katherine Yoder, inclusive of all of the suggested revisions.

Person First language emphasis a person before their disability, suggesting that a disability is just one of many factors that define who an individual truly is. All of the suggested changes in Ms. Yoder's document suggest removing outdated language or replacing such language with person first terms. These suggestions align with previous federal language revisions (e.g., Rosa's Law, <https://www.jointherevolution.org/50-game-changers/rosas-law>) and guidelines for writing and speaking about individuals with disabilities such as those put forth by the National Center on Disability and Journalism (<https://ncdj.org/style-guide/>).

I would like to take the opportunity to specifically call the Committee's attention to a requested change that could seem trivial or unnecessary. For example, unlike many of the other words in the list, the term 'handicap' or 'handicapped' is still used fairly readily in society. However, this phrase is rarely used in the context of Person First Language. In the Disability Language Style Guide, citing the Oxford English Dictionary, handicap is described as, "a condition that restricts a person's ability to function physically, mentally, or socially." The term is offensive and quite frankly, an inaccurate depiction when used broadly to describe a group of people. Instead, the phrase person or people with disabilities is more accurate and respectful.

I have the opportunity to spend time with people with disabilities every day. I know them well; they are people - sons and daughters, friends, coworkers. They are all unique and contribute to their communities in important ways. They are not the words that describe them, but the words we choose to use to describe them are important. They deserve respect, opportunity, and to be seen as a person, not as a label.

Thank you for the opportunity to share with the committee, and for your work to toward an important step in changing the way we view individuals with disabilities in Ohio. Language is important, and these changes are essential.

Respectfully,
Christina R Carnahan, EdD
Associate Professor, University of Cincinnati