



Ohio House Health Committee

Written Testimony on HB 281

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Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 281. My name is Liz Henrich and I am the Associate CEO of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities. We represent Ohio's Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Boards.

I am writing in support of HB 281, the Mental Health and Disability Terminology Act. The changes proposed in this bill would modify or eliminate a variety of derogatory and discriminatory words and phrases from Ohio Revised Code. While the bill modifies or removes discriminatory terminology from the Revised Code, it does not change any requirements or processes of the sections it revises.

Many of the terms that are addressed in this bill are related to outdated and problematic ways of communicating about individuals living with mental health conditions and other disabilities. These terms perpetuate the stigma about mental illness and other conditions. This stigma often arises out of fear or a lack of understanding. Education is one of the best ways to eradicate stigma and enhance compassion for individuals living with mental illness and/or other disabling conditions. This effort to update the revised code to utilize more appropriate terminology is one way to help reduce stigma.

In several instances this bill revises language related to individuals with a mental illness or other disabilities to be person first language. This important change to the way statute references individuals indicating that they are a person who happens to be experiencing or living with a mental health condition or another disability. Individuals are not defined by their condition.

We are fully supportive of this effort to infuse Revised Code with non-stigmatizing language that reflects an accurate understanding of these illnesses and disabilities and the individuals impacted by them.

As I conclude, I would like to extend our appreciation to Representative Jarrells for his leadership throughout this effort to modernize the Ohio Revised Code to update the language to align with the vernacular currently used on communities throughout the state and the nation.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. Should you have any questions, please contact me at ehenrich@oacbha.org.