

### Committees

Insurance, Ranking Member  
Rules & Reference Committee  
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### Boards, Commissions, & Special Committees:

Ohio Gun Violence Prevention Caucus, Co-Chair  
Ohio Commission on Hispanic & Latino Affairs  
Ohio Aviation & Aerospace Technology Committee  
Business First Caucus

## Jessica E. Miranda

Democratic Whip

Good afternoon Chairwoman Manning, Vice-Chairman Bird, and Ranking Member Robinson.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today in support of H.B. 619.

Mental health is a critical part of children's overall health, encompassing mental, emotional, and behavioral well-being. It influences a child's ability to learn, handle stress, and relate to others. The CDC found that, in 2016, nearly 1 in 6 U.S. children aged 2-8 (17.4%) had a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder.<sup>1</sup> This does not include how family, community, and healthcare factors are related to children's mental health. Both age and poverty level affect the likelihood of children receiving treatment for anxiety, depression, or behavior problems.<sup>2</sup>

H.B. 619 would like to alleviate the burden on our young Ohioans, by allowing a student from K-12 to take up to three "mental health days" as excused absences from school. A "mental health day" is defined as a school day during which a student attends to their emotional and psychological well-being in lieu of school, without a need for a physician's note. School districts that allow this excuse are required to implement the same policy in each school building they operate and must provide an opportunity for students to make up any school work missed during their absence(s).

This bill also specifies that, in granting mental health days, a district may excuse students from school altogether or establish an in school mental health program for students to attend in lieu of regular classes. It also specifies that once a student uses one excused mental health day, a district may refer that student to the appropriate school health and support services, such as a school counselor, a school social worker, or a school psychologist.

They also may prohibit excused mental health days from being taken on certain days of the year, "such as school days scheduled for standardized testing." However, they must provide advance notice of those days on the school calendar at the start of each school year. Finally, the bill states

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>

that absences for mental health days cannot be used in the calculation of absence hours that would otherwise trigger mandatory parental notice, under continuing law.

Now is a great time to break the stigma surrounding mental health and prioritize options for our students to excel in school while ensuring we are prioritizing their mental health. With this legislation, we are letting our children know that prioritizing their mental well-being is not only acceptable, it's critical for achieving a healthy lifestyle. This mindset will help them succeed in school and beyond no matter what path they choose.

Again, to Chairwoman Manning, Vice Chair Bird, and Ranking Member Robinson, my joint sponsor Representative Blackshear, and members of the Primary and Secondary Committee, I thank you for allowing me to testify in support of H.B. 619 today.



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