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Chair Pavliga, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brewer, and members of the House Behavioral Health Committee, thank you for giving Representative Galonski and I the chance to present sponsor testimony for House Bill 249.

House Bill 249 centers around the involuntary hospitalization of individuals grappling with mental illness by court order. Presently, Ohio law only permits involuntary hospitalization when individuals pose an immediate threat to themselves or others or cannot independently fulfill their basic needs.

Our proposed legislation seeks to broaden the scope, allowing the hospitalization of individuals struggling with severe mental illness who may not precisely fit the existing criteria in Ohio law. By introducing the concept of “psychiatric deterioration” we aim to enable the legal system to step in before individuals exhibit violent or suicidal tendencies or reach a point of self-neglect. Such early intervention can substantially mitigate the risk of negative repercussions, such as arrest, homelessness, or unemployment.

This bill encourages judges to consider the potential for further mental health decline if individuals are left untreated. It highlights the principle that individuals should not be criminalized rather than receiving essential help.

Furthermore, our legislation establishes a legal framework for individuals transitioning from involuntary hospitalization to outpatient mental health treatment.

It is noteworthy that at least 21 states have already incorporated some form of a psychiatric deterioration standard into probate law. This much needed update to our probate law enjoys the support of Ohio’s Probate Judges.

Once again, I appreciate the opportunity to present sponsor testimony on House Bill 249 alongside Representative Galonski. I am available to address any questions or provide clarifications regarding this vital legislation.