

**Bryn Hunt, Associate General Counsel and Senior Director of Employee Relations
Ohio Hospital Association**

Proponent Testimony for House Bill 249
Ohio House Behavioral Health Committee
October 31, 2023

Chairwoman Pavliga, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brewer, and members of the House Behavioral Health Committee, my name is Bryn Hunt, and I am associate general counsel and senior director of employee relations at the Ohio Hospital Association. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 249.

Established in 1915, OHA is the nation's first state-level hospital association. OHA exists to collaborate with member hospitals and health systems to ensure a healthy Ohio. OHA currently represents 248 hospitals and 15 health systems throughout Ohio. The association is governed by a 20-member Board of Trustees with representation from small and large hospitals, teaching facilities and health care systems with a committee and task force structure.

We appreciate the bill sponsors' continued interest in this topic and were pleased to see its reintroduction this general assembly. The bill would expand Ohio's definition of "mentally ill person subject to court order" to include a psychiatric deterioration standard, which would enable health care providers to provide care sooner to more vulnerable patients.

To further assist hospitals in providing care to these patients, OHA supported the changes made to House Bill 439 last year and were encouraged to see these changes were included in the as introduced version of House Bill 249. These changes would allow hospitals to ensure a patient is medically stable by providing necessary care and treatment until the person can be transferred to an appropriate facility with available beds. Under current law, general hospitals are required to transfer a pink-slipped patient to a hospital with psychiatric services within 24 hours. There are currently no exceptions to this requirement. However, many patients aren't ready to be transferred within 24 hours because of underlying medical issues that must be stabilized prior to transfer. Additionally, general hospitals frequently face challenges meeting this 24-hour transfer requirement because an appropriate psychiatric bed is not available. We support the provisions of House Bill 249 that would ensure providers are able to safely provide necessary care to patients while seeking a psychiatric provider available to receive a transfer, without fear of violating the statutory 24-hour requirement.

OHA also appreciates the language in House Bill 249 that allows the general hospital to conduct the required evaluation to release or discharge a patient if they have the appropriate practitioner on staff to do so. This would eliminate the requirement to transfer a patient in these scenarios and thus open psychiatric beds for those patients who need them. Transportation-related issues can further slowdown a patient's care, and allowing general hospitals with the necessary resources to do the evaluation on-site will make the process more efficient and less burdensome on the patient and their family, as well as freeing up resources for other patients in need.

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We urge favorable passage of House Bill 249 which would put Ohio among the many other states who already have a psychiatric deterioration standard in statute and address challenges being experienced by the hospital community while making sure patients receive the appropriate care they need. Thank you for your time and consideration.