

April 20, 2024

Re: HB 352

Chair Pavliga, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Brewer and members of the House Behavioral Health Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit written proponent testimony for House Bill 352. My name is Kirsten Simonton. I am a member of the Public Policy Committee for the Adoption Network Cleveland, and am proud to support HB 352.

As a pediatrician specializing in children who have experienced maltreatment, I am profoundly aware of the impact that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) have on developing youth. ACEs are relatively common potentially traumatic exposures including neglect, abuse, parental separation, substance abuse exposure and violence. For some children, exposure to these adversities results in prolonged stress ("toxic stress") that can lead to severe and chronic health problems including heart disease, depression, substance misuse and death by suicide.¹ These are devastating consequences that affect Ohio's families, communities and health care systems for generations.

It is critical to understand that ACEs and their subsequent harms are preventable. Studying the relative prevalence of ACEs in specific regions or populations of our state would allow for directed interventions addressing the social inequities and stressors that can be precursors to these traumatic events. Furthermore, if children are identified early following exposure to one or more ACEs, research has shown the positive effect that safe, stable, nurturing relationships can have on mitigating the effects of toxic stress.² Therefore, legislative strategies informed by a study commission can improve population health through several preventative initiatives.

Understanding and addressing the prevalence and impact of ACEs on a legislative level would mean prioritizing the physical and mental health of Ohio's most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of H.B. 352. If you have any questions feel free to contact me for any additional information that may be helpful.

Sincerely,

Kirsten Simonton, MD

Child Abuse Pediatrician
Fellow, American Academy of Pediatrics
Member, Board of Directors, Adoption Network Cleveland
Member, Public Policy Committee, Adoption Network Cleveland
(216)-403-4768
kirsten.simonton@gmail.com

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/>

² <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/campaigns-and-toolkits/preventing-adverse-childhood-experiences/>