

24 June 2024

Good Afternoon,

My name is Nora O'Donnell and I am an independently licensed professional clinical counselor and supervisor and also hold a professional school counseling license in the state of Ohio. Additionally, I earned a Masters degree in Special Education during my five-year career as a high school English teacher. In short, I have spent over 20 years working with children and adolescents in various school settings as a teacher, mentor, coach, outpatient counselor, mental health specialist, and school counselor. Currently in my 4th year as a member of the Board of Directors of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation, I am dedicated to increasing suicide prevention, breaking the stigma of mental illness, and raising awareness of mental health supports available to our young people. I am grateful for the opportunity to submit my testimony to this Committee today and to the House of Representatives. I thank you all for recognizing the importance of the Student Safety Bill (HB571) sponsored by Representative White to reduce the suicide rate among Ohio's young people.

In a May 2020 study published by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve¹, the Fed aggregated, to the weekly level, the data collected from three years' of time diaries available as part of the Child Development Supplements (CDS) of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). The time diaries cover all school-age children and adolescents (with roughly 1/3 of the sample in elementary school and kindergarten, 1/3 in middle school, and 1/3 in high school) and give detailed breakdowns of each child's time use over a full 24 hours for one weekend day and one weekday. Not surprisingly, the single largest use of children and adolescents' time was sleep (at about 40%) and, the second largest category, at nearly 20%, was time spent in school. Knowing that our youth are spending about 1/3 of their waking hours with their school communities, it would be an incredible missed opportunity for this Committee to ignore the potential life-saving possibilities that could result from the required inclusion of the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (988) on student ID cards, planners, and electronic portals.

The 2022 Ohio Child Fatality Review (CFR) Annual Report submitted by the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) indicates several factors that increase suicide risk, including, but not limited to: history of mental health conditions, loss of connectedness, stigma around mental health treatment, and bullying. One of the key findings underscored by the ODH is that 76% of the child suicide deaths from 2017 through 2021 were found to be preventable².

More specifically—and perhaps more germane to this hearing—according to ODH's 2021 Suicide Demographics and Trends, “from 2020 to 2021, the rate of youth (ages 10-24) suicide in Ohio increased 5% with 260 total deaths³.” While it's striking to think Ohio lost about 3 students to death by suicide every 2 school days in that time period, it's more astonishing to realize that

those numbers don't account for the nearly 20% of high school students who have seriously considered suicide or the 9% who attempted suicide⁴.

My professional credentials and national and state statistics aside, I also am submitting testimony to you today as a loving aunt to eight young people whom I know would benefit from HB571. In August, Terrence, Emmett, Kevin, Charlie, Claire, Molly, Maggie, and Andrew will be attending seven different schools, elementary to high school, spread across the state and I believe that we are responsible for ensuring that each of them—and all of their friends—are in school communities that promote suicide prevention and fight to break the stigma of mental illness by including the National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline 988 on student ID cards, planners, and online portals.

My thanks, again, to the House of Representatives for their consideration of the Student Safety Bill (HB571) and its life-saving potential for all students in Ohio schools and institutions of higher education. Please do not hesitate to contact me (information below) if with any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

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¹<https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/how-do-children-spend-their-time-time-use-and-skill-development-in-the-psid-20200526.html>

²https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/90244060-fa6c-4e52-b5a7-43889b5af5e6/CFR+2022+Report.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18_79GCH8013HMOA06A2E16IV2082-90244060-fa6c-4e52-b5a7-43889b5af5e6-oPlwVFI

³https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/4baa1e2a-835f-4286-9846-561fc46649a6/2021+Suicide+Fact+Sheet_Final.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18_M1HGGIK0N0JO00QO9DDDDM3000-4baa1e2a-835f-4286-9846-561fc46649a6-owcgAP-

⁴Jones SE, Ethier KA, Hertz M, et al. Mental Health, Suicidality, and Connectedness Among High School Students During the COVID-19 Pandemic — Adolescent Behaviors and Experiences Survey, United States, January–June 2021. MMWR Suppl 2022;71(Suppl-3):16–21. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su7103a3>