

Committees

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Primary and Secondary Education  
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Ohio Gun Violence Prevention Caucus, Co-Chair  
Joint Legislative Ethics Committee  
Business First Caucus

**Jessica E. Miranda**  
Democratic Whip

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

I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today in support of H.B. 38.

The mental, emotional and behavioral health of our children is paramount to their 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> Furthermore, mental health conditions are commonly diagnosed in multiples. For example, 3 in 4 children diagnosed with depression, were diagnosed with anxiety as well<sup>2</sup>. This does not account for how family, community, and healthcare factors are related to children's mental health. A variety of factors, including age and poverty level, affect the likelihood of a child receiving treatment for anxiety, depression, or behavior problems.<sup>3</sup>

H.B. 38 would like to alleviate the burden on our young Ohioans, by allowing a student from Kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade 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

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

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

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/childrensmentalhealth/data.html>

notice of those days on the school calendar at the start of each school year. Finally, the bill states 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.

Covid-19 not only made people physically sick, but for many, manifested mental health issues as well. Now is a great time to break the stigma surrounding mental health. We must prioritize options for our students to excel in school while ensuring we are caring for them and 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. If a child has pink eye, we excuse and even encourage their absence from school; H.B. 38 simply asks for us to consider mental health as we do physical health.

Again, to Chairman Bird, Vice Chair Arthur, 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. 38 today.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica E. Miranda". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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