



Office of Representative Willis E. Blackshear Jr.
State Representative
77 S. High St.
Columbus, OH 43215

Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee thank you for allowing me to present sponsor testimony for HB 38: The Student Mental Health Act alongside my joint sponsor, Rep. Miranda.

HB 38 is all about connecting students to the resources that they need to address their mental health. The reality is that many students in our schools face a number of stressors that can lead to a mental health crisis. From financial stress, to social anxiety, to preexisting mental health conditions there are a plethora of reasons why a student may have a serious mental health concern that requires intervention. With this bill we are ensuring that students have a lifeline in those scenarios, and teaching kids from a young age that they have the ability to reach out and receive the help they need.

It is important to emphasize that this bill maintains local control. If a school district has an issue with chronic absenteeism, or lacks the resources to be able to refer students to appropriate mental health supports then they may choose not to implement this policy. The reason we need to take action as a state is to ensure that school districts that do want to implement this policy are able to do so without facing issues in regard to truancy violations since this bill ensures that excused mental health absences would not count against truancy regulations already in place. In this way we are supporting our local school districts so that they can implement these policies how they see fit.

In introducing this bill during the previous general assembly my colleague and I realized just how needed this legislation is. Many students and counselors reached out to us in support of the bill and the efforts to allow our students to prioritize their mental health at an early age. The need to address the mental health of our youth has never been greater, and we have an amazing opportunity to take action now.



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Chair Bird, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and members of the Primary and Secondary Education Committee thank you again for allowing me to present testimony. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have.