



## Ohio Association of Rheumatology

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### **Proponent Testimony to the House Public Health Policy Committee House Bill 538 – Designate Lupus Awareness Month November 20, 2024**

The Ohio Association of Rheumatology (OAR) is a leading professional organization for the specialty of rheumatology, a branch of medicine devoted to the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the joints, muscles, and bones, as well as certain autoimmune diseases, including lupus. As specialists in this area, the OAR encourages efforts to bring public awareness to a disease whose symptoms are not always readily visible. We therefore strongly support HB 538, to designate May as “Lupus Awareness Month.”

Systemic lupus erythematosus (lupus) is a chronic autoimmune disease that can affect nearly every organ in the body. Lupus is unpredictable, with symptoms that can range from fatigue, joint pain, and skin rashes to serious complications involving the kidneys, heart, and nervous system.

Low public awareness and understanding of lupus contributes to a difficult and challenging road to diagnosis that many people experience. The impact on young minority women, in particular, cannot be ignored. Not only are there higher instances of lupus cases among these women, but the impact of the disease is often more severe.

Well-regarded studies find that irreversible organ damage will occur in up to 50% of lupus patients within five years of diagnosis. Additionally, approximately 40% of lupus patients globally develop lupus nephritis, which can lead to end-stage kidney disease.

HB 538 to Designate Lupus Awareness Month recognizes several facts including that prompt diagnosis and treatment are crucial for patients with lupus and lupus nephritis and that these conditions are more common in and disproportionately impact women and patients of color. The legislation is a critical step in ensuring that those with lupus are seen, heard, and supported. By increasing awareness, we are not only improving health outcomes, but we are also giving a voice to those who have long been marginalized by their illness.

Please support HB 538 to bring lupus out of the shadows, and to make a tangible difference in the lives of millions of Americans living with this debilitating disease.