



Senate General Government Committee  
Senate Bill 158  
September 25, 2023

Opponent Testimony  
Written Only

Elaine Schleiffer, co-founder, REACH NEO

To Chair Rulli, Vice Chair Schuring, Ranking Member DeMora, and members of the Senate General Government Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 158. My name is Elaine Schleiffer, I am an appointed member of Cleveland's Mental Health Response Advisory Committee, a piece of our consent decree, and I am working on a project that could be funded by participatory budgeting should city residents affirm that program for our city's use.

As you know, the rates of severe mental illness (SMI) and substance use disorder (SUD) crises are rising, and every community across the state is being impacted—urban, rural, wealthy, or facing poverty, Ohioans everywhere are struggling. One proven solution, that helps to reduce the incidence of crisis that takes place in the community AND helps to increase rates of acceptance of care by those most in need of resources, is care response. Care response sends specially trained behavioral health responders to 911 calls that are nonviolent and relate to SMI, SUD, and other behavioral disruptions.

Our city council in Cleveland has yet to take up the issue of care response, even as rates of behavioral health disruptions across the city rise month over month and have since COVID. I suspect all of you can draw your own conclusions about the obfuscation and inefficiency that mark my city's politics. But as a resident of the city, this makes me ask: how long do you want me and my neighbors to wait before we activate on our own behalf? **How many generations of Clevelanders do you want alienated from civic engagement?**

**Clevelanders like me are no longer willing to wait.** We see the impact of that waiting can have on families struggling with SMI, SUD, and other behavioral health needs. We see programmatic solutions proving success in cities like Baltimore, New Orleans, and Albuquerque and we wonder why our families are doomed to witness the preventable deaths of people we love. We

are not willing to lose any more of our family members or neighbors to lack of services, or lack of access to care.

Senate Bill 158 directly opposes my inalienable right to pursue life, liberty, and the happiness that is adequate care and resources for myself, my family, and my city. Senate Bill 158 says that it is NOT the right of the people to lay down foundational principles and the reorganization of power that seem most likely to impact my safety and happiness. **Senate Bill 158 overrides my right, and my duty, to provide new guards for my future security, and for the securing of my democratic rights.**

The principles above are quoted from John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman, Robert Livingston, and other founders, who chose these words to open the Declaration of Independence. I hope my current representative democracy remains as dedicated to these principles today as the 56 delegates who signed that document.

I am a proud citizen of the state of Ohio, a taxpaying homeowners voting and involved citizen of the city of Cleveland, and I believe in the self-evident truth that my rights are equal to yours. **I believe Senate Bill 158 opposes foundational democratic principles that are the core of our country's ideology and identity.**

**I urge you to vote no on Senate Bill 158.**

Thank you,

Elaine Schleiffer