



Proponent Testimony for Senate Bill 60
Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee
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John Rizzo
Vice President, Government Affairs, Greater Akron Chamber

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, my name is John Rizzo, vice president of government affairs for the Greater Akron Chamber and I'm writing you on behalf of several members of the Ohio Metro Chambers Coalition to express our support of Senate Bill 60.

The Ohio Chamber and the regional metropolitan chambers from Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, and Youngstown support Senate Bill 60 because of two main points that greatly affect our member organizations. First, the addiction and mental health crisis has hit our members adversely. We have heard countless stories of our members losing workforce because of the mental health and addiction crisis in Ohio. As it stands now, in a post-pandemic world, it is already difficult for many of our members to fill job vacancies and maintain a quality workforce. The mental health and addiction crisis has further exacerbated this problem.

Second, a program like this will fill the need for the large void in the behavioral healthcare workforce shortage. As it stands right now, there is already a shortage of psychiatrists in the state, and few advanced nurse practitioners and physicians assistants go into to practice in the mental health space because the other clinical fields are more lucrative. The concept of the Certified Mental Health Assistant keeps these individuals in the mental health and addiction space.

What is also appealing about this concept is the fact that Ohio can take the lead with innovative solutions to help fill the void in the behavioral health care workforce. If we move forward with this concept, all graduates from this program will have to stay in Ohio. We have a fantastic university system throughout the state. While NEOMED is the pilot for this program, it is our understanding that other universities are interested in this as well. That being the case these graduates could fill the void in behavioral health in all regions of the state.

Chairman Cirino, thank you for allowing us to share our collective support for Senate Bill 60 today and for your consideration on this issue. We are happy to address questions or comments via email at jrizzo@greaterakronchamber.org.