



Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee

Testimony of Jessica McClure, PsyD, Medical Director of Population Behavioral Health
Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center
Senate Bill 60
June 24, 2024

Chairman Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, my name is Dr. Jessica McClure, and I am a psychologist at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. My work at Cincinnati Children's has included direct patient care as well as program development to spread access to evidence-based mental and behavioral health services. This program development includes the building and spread of training programs aimed at increasing individual's knowledge and competencies in identifying and treating mental and behavioral health concerns across multiple disciplines and settings.

I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 60, which would create a new licensed allied healthcare professional called a Certified Mental Health Assistant (CMHA).

The impact of the behavioral and mental health crisis on youth, families, and communities necessitates a strategic approach to increase access to effective prevention, early intervention, and treatment services. While the current workforce is insufficient to meet the growing behavioral health needs, a number of resources and programs, led by Cincinnati Children's and others, are being spread to increase access to care. A critical component of effectively increasing access to care is leveraging programs with a strong evidence base, standardized training approaches, and defined measures of clinical outcomes.

To accomplish these goals, several initiatives, some of which are supported with ARPA funding, have aimed to increase individuals entering existing professions, sustaining individuals in those roles, and spreading training and support efforts for professionals across the care continuum in pursuit of better behavioral health care and outcomes. For example, 1) training through residency programs, 2) increasing embedded behavioral health providers in primary care and schools, 3) learning networks, and 4) programs such as Project ECHO, bring community primary care, behavioral health, and school providers together with subspecialists to expand access and improve outcomes. These efforts leverage existing, evidence based, and standardized training approaches and systems of care to maximize the impact on the mental and behavioral health needs of youth. SB 60 would detrimentally create a new licensed allied healthcare professional called a Certified Mental Health Assistant (CMHA) without the benefits of these established standards, and thus Cincinnati Children's is opposed to SB 60 as introduced.

While this new licensure program, unique to Ohio, has the spirit of increased access, it does not address the core issues of shortages of behavioral and mental health services. The addition of another type of professional who has duplicative roles with existing professionals may dilute efforts and resources. Existing, effective programs to enhance the training and skills of established professional roles already offer a path to improved care and access. Resources would be more impactful if directed to those proven models. For example, physician assistants and APRNs are licensed professionals that are able to assume the roles being proposed in this bill. Focusing recruitment and retention efforts while expanding advanced training for those professions allows for opportunities to address workforce shortages without the establishment of a new professional category which would be duplicative of roles. Further, programs unique to one state pose additional barriers to care for families who live in certain regions where they may seek care in a bordering state and would be limiting to those obtaining this certification.

For the reasons stated above, Cincinnati Children's is opposed to SB 60 as introduced.