

HB32 Proponent Testimony

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Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and all other esteemed members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB32, which would designate July as “Celebrating Disabilities Month” in Ohio. My name is Sally Fish, and I am a Disability Rights Advocate for The Ability Center of Greater Toledo.

*The Ability Center of Greater Toledo is a Center for Independent Living which serves 13 counties in NW Ohio. Our mission is to make Toledo the most disability friendly in the nation by increasing independence for people with disabilities, discovering true passions, and changing the community’s perception of disability.*

As a Center for Independent Living, we strongly support HB32 as it provides an essential platform to recognize the contributions, experiences, and needs of people with disabilities in our state.

## Importance of Celebrating Disabilities Month

People with disabilities represent a substantial segment of Ohio’s population. According to the **2024 Annual Report** from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities, approximately **13.9% of Ohioans report having a disability**, a rate that exceeds the national average.<sup>1</sup> Despite the significant number of people in Ohio with a disability, their contributions, challenges, and experiences are still widely unknown to individuals in the state without a disability or without a connection to the disability world.

Establishing “Celebrating Disabilities Month” in July aligns with the anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), a landmark civil rights law that has improved accessibility and equity for millions of Americans with disabilities. However, despite these advancements, many barriers remain in employment, transportation, healthcare, and education. This month would serve as a

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<sup>1</sup> Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities. *FY24 Annual Report*. State of Ohio, 2024, [https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/v1722549738/dodd.ohio.gov/Reports/FY24 - Annual Report Final.pdf](https://dam.assets.ohio.gov/image/upload/v1722549738/dodd.ohio.gov/Reports/FY24_-_Annual_Report_Final.pdf).

dedicated time to raise awareness, highlight achievements, and advocate for continued progress in disability inclusion.

## Promoting Disability Awareness and Inclusion

Designating July as "Celebrating Disabilities Month" would encourage communities, businesses, and policymakers to focus on accessibility, inclusion, and the rights of people with disabilities.

Public recognition can:

- Educate Ohioans about the history of disability rights and the importance of inclusive policies.
- Encourage businesses and organizations to assess and improve their accessibility efforts.
- Provide a platform for individuals with disabilities to share their stories and experiences, fostering greater understanding and empathy.
- Promote initiatives that support employment, independent living, and community integration for people with disabilities.

## Encouraging Policy Action and Advocacy

While awareness is crucial, it must also lead to action. A dedicated month for celebrating disabilities would serve as an annual reminder for Ohio legislators to evaluate existing policies and explore ways to improve services, accessibility, and protection(s) for people with disabilities.

This could include:

- Strengthening ADA compliance and enforcement in public spaces.
- Expanding accessible transportation options across Ohio.
- Increasing funding for disability services and independent living programs.
- Addressing healthcare disparities faced by individuals with disabilities across the broader Ohio landscape.

## Conclusion

By passing House Bill 32, Ohio would join other states in recognizing the importance of disability inclusion and affirm its commitment to equal opportunities for all residents. This designation is not just symbolic—it has the potential to drive meaningful conversations, initiatives, and policy changes that will benefit Ohioans with disabilities for years to come.