

HB32

Interested party testimony

Maria Sutter

Peer Support and Advocacy Specialist at Linking Employment Abilities and Potential (LEAP)

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Members Somani and Baker, and Members of the Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony regarding HB32. My name is Maria Sutter, and I serve as the Peer Support and Advocacy Specialist at Linking Employment Abilities and Potential (LEAP).

Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP) is an agent of positive change, working to advance participation and equality in society for people with disabilities in Northeast Ohio. LEAP's mission is to advance a society of equal opportunity for all persons, regardless of disability.

I am proud to represent the disability community in several capacities. First, I am a woman with a spinal cord injury because of a bicycle accident. I also work for a Center for Independent Living where I have coworkers with disabilities and serve the disability community in Northeast Ohio. Additionally, I participate in several statewide, disability focused, advocacy groups, including the Ohio Olmstead Task Force and the Breaking Silences Advocacy Committee. Both groups strive to spread awareness about the need for inclusivity for individuals with disabilities within our communities. Finally, I am the aunt of a niece with intellectual disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities have a history of being sidelined, ostracized and forgotten

History for individuals with disabilities is not joyful. Aristotle believed people with disabilities were incapable of reason. At other points in history, anyone with a disability would be sent to an asylum. Many societies created laws that were blatantly discriminatory because people with disabilities were a danger to society, unfit to be around children, and defective. Unfortunately, the United States was not exempt from these discriminatory practices.

Justly, as civil rights legislation began to change for other minority groups in the 1960s and 70s, people with disabilities also noticed a small shifts. Much of the first legislation was limited to access to public spaces. In 1990, after decades of public protest and national efforts to raise awareness, the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed. This landmark legislation grants equal access to employment, public services and public accommodations.

Barriers to inclusion for people with disabilities remain but the fight for these rights has not been through sweeping national movements. Instead, individuals and groups of individuals have done the state and local advocacy. For example, in 1999 Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson won

a lawsuit known as the Olmstead Decision. It enabled them to receive support services so they could live in the community instead of a state institution. HB32 is joyful legislation celebrating the positive and negative facets of disability history and the warriors who pushed for progress.

Disability is part of the human experience

According to the Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data, approximately 54 million Americans have a disability¹; about 20% of the adult population. Disability is a unique cultural group that anyone can join at any time, whether through accident, illness, or aging, and that you can be part of for only a short period, for multiple times throughout your life, or for your entire life. Furthermore, disability can be something very recognizable, like my spinal cord injury that requires me to use a wheelchair, or very hidden, like my niece's intellectual disabilities, that are only obvious when she is learning new concepts and trying to read. It is very possible that one or several of the members of this committee have a disability or have experienced disability at some point in their life. It is just one possible nuance of being human that has gotten a negative stigma. HB32 is an effort to destigmatize disability.

Cause for celebration

The big takeaway is that disability does not discriminate. It can happen to anyone, at any time. Society on the other hand, has historically discriminated against individuals with disabilities, and unfortunately continues to do so. HB32 would designate July as a month to celebrate not only individuals with disabilities, but also the historical efforts of individuals, families, advocates, and legislators that have worked tirelessly for societal justice. HB32 also acknowledges the continued effort of these groups to identify legal and cultural practices that do not allow people with disabilities full participation in daily living. Finally, it celebrates Governor DeWine's commitment to supporting people with disabilities, as recognized in his first executive order in 2019 that established Ohio as a Disability Inclusion State.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB32. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns at msutter@leapinfo.org.

Sincerely,



Maria Sutter
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Linking Employment, Abilities, and Potential (LEAP)

¹ ADA National Network, <https://adata.org/faq/how-many-people-united-states-have-disability#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20Survey%20of,was%20last%20updated%20April%2C%202025>