

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the House Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on House Bill 32.

My name is Richard Payne,

I am the President of the National Federation of the Blind of Ohio and we fully support this bill.

I worked in a factory that paid less than the minimum wage and for over 10 years I worked side by side with my fellow co-workers.

It became very obvious to me that no matter how hard I worked because I am blind the company was going to exploit me and others who were disable.

I worked the same job and done the same work we were not able to advance and was told that paying us would not benefit us.

My friends that had no disability was getting paid two dollars more than the blind workers.

I asked about that and was told that those workers could go to other jobs and blind people could not so their pay was better to keep them.

The only way that I was able to get the fair wage was after leaving that job now I work for a company that appreciates my commitment, and it feels great.

Many of my friends are still subject to this discrimination and if this law is successful, we all will be proud.

Every July, we commemorate the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act—a groundbreaking civil rights law that fundamentally reshaped our nation’s understanding of access and dignity. The ADA tore down walls, opened doors, and reminded us that inclusion is not charity—it is justice. But for all the progress we’ve made, we know the work is far from finished.

Today in Ohio, far too many of our neighbors with disabilities still face unnecessary and unjust obstacles to full participation in public life. They’re said “no” when they apply for jobs. They face physical barriers to buildings, services, and transit. And too often, their talents and voices are ignored, underestimated, or excluded entirely.

And yet, in every corner of our state—from rural towns to bustling cities—Ohioans with disabilities are showing up. They are some of the hardest-working people in our communities. They’re bagging our groceries, caring for our elders, teaching in our schools, leading advocacy movements, and innovating in workplaces across the state.

They are doing this not because the path is easy—but because their spirit is unshakable. Their resilience is unmatched.

Disability Pride Month is not just symbolic. It is a declaration—a declaration that we see you, we honor you, and we are committed to building a state where your full humanity is not only recognized—but celebrated.

It is a time for Ohio to recognize that disability is not something to be pitied or hidden, but embraced as part of the rich diversity that makes our communities stronger. It is a time to elevate the voices of people who have too often been silenced or spoken for. And it is a time to commit—not just with words, but with action—to building an Ohio where disability is not seen as a limitation, but as a vital part of the human experience.

By officially designating July as Celebrating Disabilities Month, we send a clear message:

That Ohio is a state where everyone belongs. That dignity is not conditional.

That every Ohioan—regardless of ability—deserves the chance to live with freedom, independence, and purpose.

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of this committee—thank you for your time, your service, and your thoughtful consideration of this bill.

Richard Payne, President National Federation of the Blind of Ohio