



April 8, 2025

Re: Testimony HB 32

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

My name is Dr. Kara Ayers. I am an Ohioan with a disability and the Associate Director of the University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for House Bill 32, which would designate July as "Celebrating Disabilities Month" in Ohio.

### **Why This Designation Matters**

Approximately one in four Ohioans lives with a disability, representing a significant portion of our state's population. Despite this substantial presence, people with disabilities continue to face barriers to full inclusion, equal opportunities, and proper recognition of their contributions to our communities. HB 32 provides an important opportunity to address these challenges.

### **Raising Visibility and Combating Stigma**

The designation of July as "Celebrating Disabilities Month" would align Ohio with the nationwide observance of Disability Pride Month, creating a dedicated time for:

- Highlighting the accomplishments, talents, and contributions of Ohioans with disabilities
- Promoting awareness of disability as a natural part of human diversity rather than a deficit
- Reducing stigma through increased understanding and interaction
- Creating platforms for self-advocacy and authentic representation

Research has consistently shown that increased visibility and positive representation of people with disabilities leads to improved public attitudes, reduced discrimination, and enhanced quality of life outcomes.

### **Educational Opportunities**

Our educational system currently provides limited opportunities to learn about disability history, culture, and civil rights movements. A designated month would:

- Encourage libraries, schools, and community centers to create educational programming
- Provide context for understanding landmark legislation like the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Help youth with disabilities develop positive identity and self-advocacy skills
- Foster inclusive perspectives among non-disabled youth during formative years

### **Economic and Civic Benefits**

Beyond social awareness, this designation would yield tangible benefits for our state:

- Enhanced workforce participation through improved employer awareness and inclusion
- Increased civic engagement among Ohioans with disabilities
- Reduced economic costs associated with exclusion and discrimination
- Alignment of state policies with best practices in disability inclusion



### **A Meaningful Step Forward**

While a month-long designation is just one step toward full inclusion, it represents an important public commitment to valuing the lives, experiences, and contributions of Ohioans with disabilities. This designation would signal that Ohio recognizes disability as an aspect of humanity worthy of celebration rather than simply a medical condition requiring treatment.

By passing HB 32, Ohio would join a growing movement that understands disability through the lens of identity, culture, and civil rights—moving beyond outdated models focused solely on charity or medical intervention.

I urge your support for House Bill 32 and welcome any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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