

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Joseph Kaiser. I am a resident of Norwalk, OH, a parent and community member who believes deeply in protecting the safety and wellbeing of Ohio's children.

I am strongly opposed to HB 172.

Under current Ohio law, ORC 5122.04 allows minors aged 14 and older to access up to *six* mental health sessions or *30 days* of care—whichever comes first—without parental consent. These are extremely limited, tightly bounded services, and they are rarely used. But when they *are* used, they are used in the most critical and high-risk situations imaginable.

That is exactly why the law exists.

HB 172 would fully repeal this protection. In doing so, it would eliminate one of the few lifelines available to teenagers who are experiencing abuse at home—whether physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional. For some children, that 30-day window may be their only chance to ask for help in a safe environment. It may be their only contact with a mandated reporter. It may be the single opportunity they have to disclose abuse without retaliation from the person harming them.

Repealing this statute does not “restore parental rights.” It strips abused minors of the little protection they currently have.

There are also practical, non-abuse-related circumstances in which this law is vital. Providers have reported instances where they *want* to involve parents, but cannot reach them or parents simply do not respond. Some parents work multiple jobs, travel for work, lack stable housing, or struggle with their own health issues. In these cases, interrupting a teen's mental health treatment—not for clinical reasons, but because of administrative barriers—does nothing to support families and actively harms the child.

These limited sessions are not a replacement for long-term care. They are not secretly expanded services. They are a bridge—a short, tightly controlled period meant to stabilize a minor long enough to ensure they are safe, evaluate their situation, and involve guardians whenever doing so is safe and feasible.

Nothing about the current statute is extreme. But HB 172's repeal of it would be.

Mental health professionals across the country consistently warn that breakdowns in early intervention dramatically increase the risk of suicide, self-harm, and long-term trauma in adolescents. Removing this safety valve will not strengthen families; it will endanger children.

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this *dangerous* bill. There is nothing more important than protecting Ohio children from abuse, and HB 172 strips away one of the only tools we have to do so.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.