



HB 172 Opposition Testimony

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November 19, 2025

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony against House Bill 172, and raise our concerns about the incredible danger it poses to children in Ohio.

The Academy of Medicine of Cleveland & Northern Ohio represents more than 7,500 physicians and medical students in Northeast Ohio. For more than 200 years, we have worked to protect public health and promote the highest quality practice of medicine for all Ohioans.

The ability for adolescents to seek out and receive treatment in moments of crisis without delay is critical. Unfortunately, many of Ohio's kids and teens are not okay. The most recent Youth Behavior Risk Survey¹ found that 18% of high schoolers seriously considered suicide, and 9% of high schoolers attempted to die by suicide in 2023. In the Ohio Healthy Youth Environment Survey², more than 1000 children reported attempting suicide at least once, if not more. In the course of one year, Ohio's Mobile Response and Stabilization Services program received more than 10,000 calls, primarily concerning suicide and family conflict³. Ohio's youth are in distress, and it is imperative that this body does everything in its power to create the circumstances that help our children to not only survive, but to thrive. Doing that means we have to be willing to make sure we take down as many barriers to care as we can for these kids, and not, as this bill proposes, put up more.

¹ Ohio Youth Surveys. YRBS/YTS High School Mental Health, Suicide, and Self-Harm 2023. Ohio.gov. Published 2024.

<https://youthsurveys.ohio.gov/reports-and-insights/yrbs-yts-reports/2023/yrbs-yts-high-school-mental-health-suicide-and-self-harm-2023>

² Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey (OHYES!). (2024). Ohio Healthy Youth Environments Survey - OHYES!: Entire State Report for 2023-2024. Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

<https://youthsurveys.ohio.gov>

³ Frances M. Ohio expands youth mental health crisis services to all 88 counties. Cleveland. Published November 7, 2025. Accessed November 10, 2025. <https://www.cleveland.com/open/2025/11/ohio-expands-youth-mental-health-crisis-services-to-all-88-counties.html>

Ohio law currently allows children ages 14 and older to seek out and receive mental health services without parental consent for up to 6 sessions or 30 days, whichever comes first, after which services must stop, or parents must be notified. This provision does not allow providers to bill parents, nor are they allowed to start medications for children without the consent or knowledge of a guardian. The current law is a commonsense measure that lets providers intervene without delay when a teenager comes to them in need of mental health assistance.

House Bill 172 would see that adolescents are not able to receive mental health care until their parent or guardian has given consent. This could have a chilling effect on the willingness of kids to ask for help when they need it. If, for whatever reason, the child is not sure how to talk to their parent about their feelings, the idea that a mental health provider would have to immediately involve the parent could absolutely turn a teen off from seeking help at all. From the OHYES! survey, we know that barely over half of students reported feeling like they could talk to an adult in their family or caring adult about their feelings, and 15% of students said they never felt able to talk about that.

I want to be clear: as physicians, we absolutely know that parental involvement in mental health treatment is a best practice and leads to better health outcomes. It is emphasized throughout our training and licensing exams that, even when a child does not need parental consent for certain medical conversations, we as clinicians ought to encourage our minor patients to discuss things with their parents or guardians. Everyday, we see caregivers that are doing everything in their power to make sure their kids know they are loved and cared for, and that they should not be afraid to ask for help.

But what we also know is that stigma and fear of other people's reactions can be barriers that stop people of all ages from seeking what is often lifesaving care. A 2019 study⁴ in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that 32% – the largest category – of teen-reported barriers to mental health were parent-related. These included general issues with parents, communication issues with parents, and parent resistance to the adolescent accessing care. For students who are LGBTQ+, these reported barriers were even higher.

More recently, a study⁵ in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that in states where adolescents are prohibited from independently consenting to mental health treatment,

⁴ Mora VA, Sung JY, Roulston CA, Schleider JL. Mixed-Methods Examination of Adolescent-Reported Barriers to Accessing Mental Health Services. *Journal of Adolescent Health*. 2023;74(2). doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2023.08.034>

⁵ Schleider JL, Smock A, Ahuvia IL, et al. State Parental Consent Law and Treatment Use Among Adolescents With Depression. *JAMA Pediatrics*. 2025;179(2):209. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2024.5361>

only 37.2% of those with a recent major depressive episode received treatment, compared to 46.7% of those kids in states with limited or no stipulations on accessing care. Currently, Ohio is in the limited stipulations category – if this body pursues HB 172, we will be among those states that mandate caregiver consent and run the risk of significantly lower treatment use.

House Bill 172 is, frankly, a pro-suicide bill. By requiring parental consent before a minor can even begin care with a mental health professional, this bill is asking our providers to slam the door in the face of desperate children. At a time when so many of Ohio's teens are struggling with their mental health and feel like they don't know who to turn to, this bill will take away one more avenue of help that could make a life-saving difference. Rather than force providers to turn children away, our public officials and the other adults in Ohio need to be fighting the stigma that makes kids afraid to open up. We ask that you please vote no on House Bill 172.