

Thank you all for the opportunity to speak. My name is Usayd Ashraf, and I am a junior at Springfield High School. I am here to talk about what this bill could look like not through the eyes of legislators or trained adults, but through the eyes of a student. Growing up in Springfield Ohio, and attending Springfield High School, I have seen many things that honestly are not talked about enough. Whether it is students passing around vapes in the bathroom to carrying around painkillers in their bookbag, many students are using substances like these, not in pursuit of fitting in with others, but to deal with anxiety, depression, and whatever their situation may be like at home.

Members of the Committee these aren't just cases that are specific to Springfield right now, they are events that are happening with teens just like myself all over the state of Ohio. Now the current law allows students to discuss problems with a trained mental health professional for up to 6 sessions without the need of parental consent. This window of time is what allows the students to deal with their problems, whether it is opening up about personal issues, figuring out ways to fix their conflicts, and just taking a breather. House Bill 172, however, would remove that option entirely. This piece of legislation assumes that most kids have a safe environment to discuss mental issues with their parents, but it is simply not the case.

I want to be clear, however, it's not the fact that parents are involved that is the problem. There are many parents across the state of Ohio that are supportive and help their kids to the best of their abilities, but for kids that do not have those types of parents or that stable environment, it would harm them, severely.

I would like to use this opportunity to share a personal story of a student from my school, that really showed me how complicated this situation really was. A student was caught using a vape in the bathroom. Security called him down to the office, and his mom was already waiting. When the staff member explained what happened, his mom looked at him and said, "I told you not to bring that to school today."

The reason for sharing this story is to admit something that is sort of taboo or we as a society do not like to admit; sometimes the parent is part of the problem. Parents have one of, if not, the largest influence on a kid's life, so when a parent is normalizing, encouraging, or replying with frustration instead of genuine concern to a problem, you can't expect that student to go home and ask them for permission to get mental health help. In fact, when that kid does not have the option to speak with a mental health professional because of their parents, they turn to the only coping mechanism they have: pills, substances, skipping school, or even hurting themselves. Many parents don't take mental health as seriously as they should. Some get angry

when the subject is brought up, some are dealing with their own mental health issues, some cultures, like mine, make it seem as if it was an unthinkable subject to talk about, and in the case like I just shared, it could encourage the behaviors we are trying to prevent.

For some students, requiring parental consent doesn't help them, it traps them. This event of bad parental influence isn't a rare case. Thousands of kids are dealing with this very reality, where their parents minimize their struggles or don't allow their children to seek the help that they truly need.

I'm speaking today because I see what my peers go through. I see their struggles. I see the stress, I see the pressure, silence, and coping. This bill removes one of the safety nets that the kids like myself are able to fall into. For the sake of the students whose voice is not heard, who don't have supportive homes to go to, or whose parents are influencing them in a negative way, I strongly urge for this bill to be opposed.