

State House Testimony - HB 172
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Good morning. My name is Emerson Babian. I am a Junior at Springfield High School. My classmates Usayd Ashraf, Jack Hill and I are presenting testimony in representation of BATS. BATS, B-A-T-S, stands for Bringing Awareness To Students. We are a youth-led prevention group in Clark County made up of almost 40 students from different schools, backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. Today, we have come to address an issue that has been a barrier to youth-led prevention and progress. When decisions are made for youth, instead of with youth. So, here we are. We stand in opposition to HB 172.

It is our understanding that HB 172 would attempt to create a stronger connection between a child and their parent by requiring parental consent for a child to receive mental health services in emergency situations. We sympathize with the ultimate goal of this bill. To create strong familial connections. That is a key ingredient in a successful society. However, the approach that HB 172 takes to achieve this common goal is (1) assumptive and (2) backwards. So let's walk through those issues.

First, by creating no exception to receiving emergency mental health care without parental consent, House Bill 172 makes a dangerously false assumption. An assumption that every child in Ohio has a parent or guardian to go to. A parent that isn't abusive. A parent that isn't addicted to drugs or alcohol. A parent that doesn't neglect the current mental health norms. When I say that assumption is dangerously false, I don't say that as an opinion. A Clark County Youth Risk Behavior Survey of high schoolers in 2023 showed that 28% of students lived with a parent who was having a problem with alcohol or drugs. 42% of students have rarely or never had a caring adult to go to about their feelings. Think about that. This bill would force over ¼ of our students to go to a potentially unstable adult before being able to receive emergency care.

Second. HB 172 addresses the issue of familial trust and strong households in a backwards manner. What does that mean? When I was little, I used to help my dad water our evergreens. He would hand me the hose, and tell me to not water the leaves but to water the roots. That's because the roots absorb the nutrients they provide the strength for the tree. But the leaves - their superficial. Watering them would be like trying to fix an issue by dealing with a surface-level symptom. They are not the underlying cause of growth or lack thereof, but rather an indicator, a visual of the progress the roots provide. I say this to show that HB 172 addresses a symptom of the disconnect within families, but not an underlying cause. In other words, dysfunctional families cause youth to need certain access to emergency mental health services. Not the other way around.

This bill unfairly puts the burden on the child to create a bond with a dysfunctional parent. Instead, if we really want to create trustworthiness and a safe space for our youth, we should start at the base of our issue. Starting more programs to create a voluntary connection between youth and their parents. Raising youth mental health awareness with our adult population. Addressing the issue of alcohol and drug abuse. Let's solve the issue at its root. Please do not let HB 172 pass.

Thank you.