

Jennifer M. Disco  
31414 Fairwin Drive  
Bay Village, OH 44140  
jennifer.disco@case.edu  
(216) 600-8849

November 18, 2025

Dear Honorable Chair and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Jennifer Disco. I am a retired active-duty Coast Guard officer, a mother of three grown children, and a lifelong advocate for doing no harm, service to others, and loving kindness. I have spent my entire life in service to the safety and well-being of others, from hurricane response to national security to protecting lives on the Great Lakes and our nation's waterways. Because of this background I view HB 172 through the lens of public safety and prevention. From that perspective, the bill is deeply concerning.

Repealing Ohio Revised Code 5122.04 creates a serious safety hazard for our state's young people. This narrow statute allows a minor age 14 or older to receive up to six counseling sessions or 30 days of outpatient care when a parent cannot or will not consent. It does not override mandated reporting, it does not allow medication, and it does not diminish the essential role of parents. It simply ensures that in moments of crisis youth are not left without any help at all. Some parents are absent or incarcerated. Some are unreachable. Some refuse to consent to care even when their child is in serious emotional distress. ORC 5122.04 exists for exactly these circumstances.

I have seen the restorative power of speaking with a trained professional in a safe, nonjudgmental environment. Telling our stories without fear or shame is often the first step toward stability and hope. As someone whose own life was saved by a social worker, I know how much difference even four to six conversations can make. These few sessions can prevent tragedy, reconnect families, and give a young person the chance to survive long enough for ongoing support.

As a mother I value parents' rights. ORC 5122.04 does not undermine them. Instead, it serves as a bridge of safety when a youth is in immediate distress and a parent is unable or unwilling to participate. If we are truly committed to safety, health, and strong family relationships, then ensuring access to mental health support is part of the solution, not a threat to it.

I am also a social work student at the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences at Case Western Reserve University. I will enter my final semester this spring and graduate in May. My entire life has been dedicated to serving others and protecting the vulnerable. My second career in social work reflects my commitment to the betterment of Ohio's children, families, and communities. It is difficult to understand why a state concerned with the well-being of its youth would take away one of the few preventive tools that exist.

The risks faced by Ohio's teens are urgent.

According to the most recent 2024 Health and Human Services Report:

- In 2023, there were 94,718 children in Ohio who were the subject of an investigated report alleging maltreatment.
- In the same year, 20,598 children were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect.
- Ohio recorded 140 child fatalities due to abuse or neglect, a rate of 5.43 per 100,000 children.
- Neglect accounted for 50.3% of cases, physical abuse for 48.0%, and sexual abuse for 18.2 percent.

In addition to abuse and neglect concerns, mental health risks among Ohio teens are substantial:

- In Ohio in 2023, 250 young people ages 10 through 24 died by suicide.
- Among adolescents ages 12 through 17, 10.1% have seriously considered suicide in the past year.
- Nearly 20% of Ohio high school students reported serious thoughts of suicide, and about 9% reported attempting suicide.
- About 40% of Ohio high school students report persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness.
- Bullying, including online harassment, remains a significant contributor to depression and suicidal thoughts among teens.

These numbers represent children in real distress. Removing access to a small number of counseling sessions does not strengthen families. It increases danger. It removes a preventive measure at a time when prevention is urgently needed.

For these reasons, both professionally and personally, I respectfully urge you to vote NO on HB 172 and preserve ORC 5122.04.

Thank you for your time and for your service to Ohio's children and families.

Sincerely,



Jennifer M. Disco  
Bay Village, Ohio  
Retired U.S. Coast Guard Officer  
MSW Candidate, CWRU Mandel School