

June 9, 2025

Proponent Testimony

HB 144 (Click, Lorenz) Regarding Communication Disability Database

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Weinstein, and Members of the Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of House Bill 144. My name is Brian Dunlap. I had the opportunity with my son, Travis, last session to share (in person) with you about how - when this legislation is passed it will not only impact his life and other health impaired individuals, parents lives, future caregivers concerns, and most importantly the first responders we rely on to make informed educated decisions in a person's time of need. We wish we could join you today, but I am recovering from knee surgery, thus my testimony will be written.

I am a retired Firefighter and Paramedic having worked for the city of Broadview Heights for 34 years. Broadview Heights is where we call our home. Married to my wife Helen of 42 years, and have 2 daughters: Denise, a Nurse Practitioner for the Veterans Administration and Sydney a computer coding specialist, and our son Travis, whom is a disabled adult child. I was retired, but I felt I might be able to give a little more back to people. I ran for office and am now a Ward 3 Councilman in Broadview Heights. I am also currently the Disability Benefits Consultant for Northern Ohio Fire Fighters appointed by Sam Gmetro, President of NOFF, where I assist firefighters as well as police officers and their families with untimely injuries and illness.

After being notified by our lobbyist and friends at the State House, Chris Sinagra and Paul Kudlak of this proposed legislation and the fact they remembered I was seeking similar legislation as far back as April of 2008, 17 years ago, I felt it most important to testify as a proponent of House Bill 144, as a parent, a first responder, and an elected official. However, more importantly for all the individuals whom this legislation will positively affect, from a disabled impaired individual and their caregivers concerns, as well as the first responder who needs this invaluable information supplied to them at a time when an impaired person's actions might mimic what one would perceive as inappropriate or bad behavior. This proposed enhanced database would greatly help all parties involved by putting up red flags for those that have impairments prior to help arriving when that help is needed and dispatched.

For four years until 2012, my wife and I had tried and involved ourselves in everything we could to make a registry like this legislation is proposing happen for clear and obvious reasons. My wife, Helen, was appointed to the Developmental Disability Council in Columbus by Governor

Kasich for two terms as a parent advocate, where her term was limited out. I then took a position as a trustee of the Ohio Brain Injury Association, which I no longer hold. Time passed and other than helping with a lot of outreach and helping individuals find the help they needed that is about as far as we got, but we were blessed to help so many.

As I looked back at the correspondence I had in 2008 with so many individuals about how important a registry could be for individuals that have underlying medical and neurological impairments that could be easily confused with improper substance abuse, or mistaken for a host of actions. This “misdiagnosis” only exists in these situations because there is no vehicle in place to identify an impairment. Unfortunately, with no history or information for one to rely on, it’s difficult at most to identify the core of what may be the problem.

As a first responder, it's not enough to imagine how an individual is suffering from a neurological impairment, either a birth defect or from an untimely injury or illness, let alone how their mental status allows them to function in society. You just don’t know unless you live in that person’s shoes. Mental status is an extremely important part of the neurological examination that is often overlooked. So, how could we expect a first responder to truly understand a person’s mental status, that again, could be clearly overlooked even in a medical setting. Why would anyone not support legislation of this nature that will give caregivers the opportunity to place well documented disabilities, especially mental impairments in a database.

As a legislator, I have an obligation to the people I represent and with this proposed state legislation HB 144 by supporting it, I have done so. It benefits my constituents in my hometown as well as moving or traveling about our great state. The boundaries of the 911 system are not as small as one might suspect. The way this legislation is drafted to incorporate 911, and how that information is gathered could have the potential to become a nationwide standard to identify individuals with impairments that are difficult to identify by all first responders,

I had to place the most difficult part of my testimony here at the end. For a moment in my life, I failed as a father and protector of my family and it’s difficult for me to express my failure and not become a bit overwhelmed. I needed to make my most important points first I mentioned my wife and 2 daughters in the beginning because my boy Travis has a separate life story you need to hear. So do many others like him, they truly need this legislation to make sure this never happens to anyone else or at least at a minimum.

Travis when he was born was like any other little boy. He played tee ball, soccer, liked helping me around the house, ‘I want to be like dad’...right.

When Travis was six (6), he was diagnosed with a brain tumor, his mom and I will never forget the day we found out at Rainbows and Babies Children Hospital. The tumor was in the middle of his brain attached to his brain stem. The procedure was nothing we could understand, but all

our confidence was in Pediatric Neurosurgeon Dr Timothy Mapstone, I was 27 at the time. The surgery took a little over 9 hours, but little did we know that was the easy part.

Now when Travis was out of surgery, the doctors weren't sure he would be able to walk or he would function normally. The procedure required splitting the cerebellum while he was in the sitting position to gain access to the center of his brain to remove the tumor. After that, the most stringent cranial radiation and chemo was then required. There was no FMLA back then. So, I would work during the day and relieve my wife when I got off. I would spend the night with Travis at the hospital. She would return for the day. This went on for 6 weeks.

Then came the social workers, therapist, oncologist and so many others. I recall a social worker asking us how we were holding up. I said good, what's the worry? She mentioned in a very caring way that many marriages struggle in not so stressful times and that marriages that have a child that goes through such an illness are more likely to get divorced because of the stress, 50% more likely. I said we're good, we have a pretty strong support system. His doctor told us countless times he should be up and running in no time. He was giving us hope, and rightfully so, only the good Lord can take away hope. However, I told my family, (and we live by this today because of the emotional roller coaster ride), that from now on, we are going to live by "hope for the best, plan for the worst and everything in between is going to be a good day." So, we went on for years with no issues. Travis went from a wheelchair to a walker then to canes, now he walks with no aids, but he still has many deficiencies from surgery and treatments.

One day while at work at the fire station on Wallings Rd. in Broadview Heights where I live, Travis was in high school. I got a call from my oldest daughter Denise.

She asked me, "What's going on with Travis?" She just happened to stop over that day. She stated there were two police cars by Travis, one in my yard and one on the street. She mentioned it looked as if he was being questioned. I said, "I don't know, get over there and find out and leave your phone on so I can hear what's going on." When My daughter approached and started to tell the officer that she was his sister and Travis has a disabling condition and might not be communicating properly, the officer told her to just hold on. He was asking Travis some questions. I then told her to give the officer her phone and that your father is a firefighter and on shift - he wants to speak with you. He took the phone and we talked, and I deescalated the situation quickly. He mentioned to me that a passerby had called 911 and said there was a drunk walking down our street that had a bottle of beer in his hand. Well, Travis walks like he could be drunk. Travis's speech is slurred like a drunk, and he drinks bottled root beer.

I didn't plan for this, and **had I not been around, or his sister, the outcome for Travis, might have been much worse.** Never did we expect the neighboring community police department to stop and interrogate my son in my own front yard. This is why HB 144 is so important. Even in

what must have been the safest and best environment (his own yard) he was still interrogated because there was no resource available to that officer had there been a registry like being proposed it likely would have been less stressful for all the parties involved. I alone bare the guilt of this, that I was unable to prepare him adequately or have a registry like proposed.

Brain Injuries are unique and probably like a snowflake no two are alike. Unlike the diabetic or epileptic, when a medical problem related to their condition arises it has usually escalated to the degree that medical intervention is needed. I am not saying that these individuals also don't need special attention, but I'm sure you'll agree it's a completely different illness than that of a TBI victim or a person with neurological impairment. The folks that have these other medical conditions can in most cases function in society at completely normal levels with moderate restrictions if any, and like I mentioned, need intervention when their condition becomes out of balance. Until that time, they, like others, are quite capable of walking normally down a sidewalk drinking whatever they want, when they want.

This is why I am submitting written testimony today in support of HB 144. If you have never listened to the Bob Woodruff story you should. Helen, my wife, went to hear Bob Woodruff speak some time ago. Mrs. Woodruff, to a tee, described the exact incident our son went through with law enforcement officials. How did she know this would happen?

She didn't, what she spoke of was the seriousness of this situation happening to victims that have suffered from a brain and neurological impairments and more importantly how common it happens.

Finally, Broadview Heights Council and the Mayor were pleased to pass resolution 2024-14 in support of last year's HB 321. I will look to work with my colleagues to do the same for HB 144, because this is so important to Ohioans.

Thank you for your time today. Thank you to the sponsors for introducing this legislation and the committee for its review of this important issue. Let's continue to have Ohio help those in need.

Sincerely,

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