

OHIO FAMILIES UNITE

FOR POLITICAL ACTION AND CHANGE

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

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Emily Cole and I am the Executive Director of Ohio Families Unite for Political Action and Change, or OFUPAC. OFUPAC was started by Ohio families directly impacted by the criminalization of poverty, police brutality, incarceration, and the criminal legal system here in Ohio. We anchor the Ohio Police Reform Policy Table, founded in the beginning of 2023. Our policy table consists of over 75 members, including families impacted by police brutality, legal experts, grassroots organizations, and local and national partners, all working in coalition to build an Ohio where everyone gets home safe each day. I am honored to be here today to stand with and for our families and our policy table as an opponent and urge you to vote no on Senate Bill 321.

To be blunt – this bill is dangerous. Ohio’s behavioral health and developmental disability institutions serve our most vulnerable Ohioans – people experiencing behavioral health crises, people battling substance use disorders, and people with vast differences in their cognitive and emotional needs. These are healthcare facilities, providing needed healthcare treatments, including stabilization, treatment, and recovery.

I have direct experience with these institutions as we’ve sought crisis care for one of our family members. I have spent hours in a crisis hospital ensuring they received the treatment they needed, while also supporting them through the trauma of being in that facility itself.

It is stressful, loud, and chaotic.

It is the absolute last place a firearm should be encouraged, let alone mandated.

My colleagues and others have shared data with you via written testimony on the real risk of escalation the presence of firearms is linked to. I’d encourage you to take the time to parse through these studies, because the research is clear - introducing firearms into patient escorts and patient interactions is dangerous for all involved and has the potential to lead to fatal consequences.

Please do not move this bill forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Emily Cole

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