

Opponent Testimony to Senate Bill 321
Ohio Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee,
March 4th, 2026

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 Stuart Lukz. I graduated with a History major and Neuroscience minor from The Ohio State University. I have worked for more than 2 years scheduling patients for mental healthcare services. I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 321.

Having scheduled more than 1,200 counseling and psychiatry appointments for patients—including working people, seniors, active duty military, veterans, formerly incarcerated people, and their children—I can confidently state that most patients seeking mental healthcare feel less safe and more distressed by the presence of police and especially firearms.

By enacting sections 5119.081 and 5123.131 of the Ohio Revised Code, SB 321 would prohibit the Directors of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (BH & DD) from restricting the carry of firearms and other weapons by special police officers at BH & DD institutions while those officers escort patients, operate metal detectors, or patrol institutional grounds.

Ohio's behavioral health and developmental disability institutions are meant to serve individuals in mental health crises and to serve residents with substantial cognitive and psychiatric disabilities. These institutions should be healthcare environments and not correctional facilities.

Many residents in these settings are members of populations (especially people of color and those with disabilities) who are subjected to disproportionately high rates of profiling and excessive force from law enforcement, along with subjection to involuntary placement in hospitals. A 2017 study in the American Journal of Public Health analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, and found that in the U.S., Disabled individuals overall face a 42.65% cumulative probability of being arrested at or before age 28, well surpassing the 29.68% arrest probability for people without disabilities. More specifically, the study found that for Black people with disabilities, this arrest probability is 55.17%, more than double the arrest probability faced by white people without disabilities (27.55%).

These patterns of discrimination leave patients at BH & DD institutions more likely to be retraumatized by an armed presence in settings that should be providing them care and support. Enabling the presence of law enforcement and firearms in these settings also raises the risks of escalation during behavioral crises, and of accidental weapon discharge or seizure. It also undermines trauma-informed care practices meant to accommodate patients, and removes professional discretion from facility leadership.

Directors and clinical administrators can better work with patients to determine appropriate security policies while factoring the acuity of patient needs, staffing, real-time safety conditions, and risks of discrimination that clinical staff need to limit and counteract. SB 321 strips that discretion and imposes a broad permission for law enforcement to be armed in some of Ohio's most sensitive healthcare environments.

Please protect mental healthcare staff, residents, and Disabled people of Ohio. Please vote NO on Senate Bill 321.

Sincerely,

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