



**Ohio School-Based Health Alliance**  
**Ohio Senate Education Committee**  
**Senate Bill 7**  
Proponent Testimony  
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**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 7**

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee,

I am Reem Aly, Executive Director of the Ohio School-Based Health Alliance. The Ohio Alliance is an independent, professional, nonpartisan, nonprofit<sup>1</sup> organization. We serve as the only statewide organization created to improve access to comprehensive, integrated health services through school-based health care and are committed to improving health and education outcomes for Ohio's students, their families, and communities.

I am expressing our strong support for Senate Bill 7, which mandates instruction on the harmful effects of substance use for all K-12 students in public and chartered nonpublic schools.

**The Role of School-Based Health Care and SBHCs**

We know that health is an important factor that contributes to a child's success both inside and outside of school. School-based health care plays a vital role in providing accessible physical and mental health services to students, laying a strong foundation for their overall health and well-being. School-based health centers (SBHCs) are a leading, evidence-driven school-based health care model for connecting children and communities to critical healthcare services. The goal of SBHCs is to reduce barriers to accessing care, promote healthy behaviors, and address health issues that can impact learning and development.

**The Imperative of Substance Use Education**

The sobering reality is that our children are facing increasing health and education challenges. According to the Health Policy Institute of Ohio, one in five Ohio children, ages 12-17, reported experiencing anxiety and more than one-third of Medicaid enrolled students in Ohio had an active behavioral health diagnosis during the 2022-2023 school

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<sup>1</sup> The Ohio Alliance was relaunched in 2021 as a fiscally sponsored initiative of [Health Impact Ohio](#), a 501(c)(3) Regional Healthcare Improvement Collaborative based in Columbus, Ohio.



year.<sup>2</sup> Substance use and mental health challenges often coexist in children, with youth turning to substance use as a coping mechanism.

Research shows that early education on the risks of substance use is effective in promoting healthier coping mechanisms among youth. By providing students with the knowledge and skills to manage both their mental health and substance use behaviors, students can reduce risky behaviors, improve their academic performance, and experience greater well-being overall. Senate Bill 7's instruction on the harmful effects of substance use for students ensures that Ohio's children are equipped with the knowledge to make informed decisions and avoid harmful behaviors. By addressing both short-term and chronic substance use, the bill lays the foundation for a comprehensive approach to substance use prevention.

### **Supporting Evidence-Based Prevention**

The bill emphasizes conforming instruction to prevention best-practice frameworks and focuses on enhancing students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills as they develop. This approach is consistent with evidence-based strategies that have proven effective in reducing substance use among adolescents.

SBHCs are uniquely positioned to support the implementation of SB 7 by:

- Collaborating with educators to develop and deliver effective substance use education programs
- Providing additional resources and support to students identified as at-risk
- Offering a safe space for students to discuss concerns related to substance use
- Removing barriers to families to access compassionate care expeditiously
- Diversifying options for school administrators to refer students to substance use treatment in lieu of ineffective or harmful disciplinary strategies

### **Conclusion**

By passing Senate Bill 7, Ohio has the opportunity to strengthen its commitment to the health and future success of its students. We urge the committee to support this legislation and leverage the resources offered by a school's health services team and SBHCs to ensure its effective implementation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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<sup>2</sup> Health Policy Institute of Ohio. (2024). *Data brief: Mental health conditions among Ohio children and youth.*