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**Senate Finance Committee
SB 257 Sponsor Testimony**

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 257.

This bill creates the Support Children's Overall Psychological and Emotional Health, or SCOPE, Pilot Program to address an important gap in the care we currently provide to children with complex medical conditions and their families.

Ohio's Children with Medical Handicaps program, or CMH, has been a vital support system for families across the state. Administered by the Ohio Department of Health, the CMH program connects families to a network of providers and helps cover the cost of care for children with serious medical conditions. It provides diagnostic services, treatment, and coordination of care, all focused on physical health.

But what I have consistently heard from constituents and advocates is that the mental and emotional strain these children and families face is often just as serious as the physical challenges. While CMH does excellent work, it does not currently support mental health services. That is the need Senate Bill 257 is designed to address.

Children living with chronic illnesses or life-altering diagnoses often face anxiety, depression, and emotional trauma. They may spend long periods in hospitals or face

frequent and invasive medical procedures. Their families are also affected. Parents and caregivers carry a heavy burden and often experience significant emotional stress while trying to care for their child, manage treatment schedules, and balance work and family responsibilities.

The SCOPE Pilot Program will provide access to mental health care for these families. It will be administered by the Ohio Department of Health in collaboration with the Department of Behavioral Health. Through the program, eligible families could receive support for services like outpatient counseling, medications for anxiety or depression, and other mental health treatments as determined by the departments.

Eligibility for the SCOPE program will be limited to families who already qualify for the CMH Treatment Program. This ensures that the pilot remains focused on families already navigating serious medical challenges and allows the state to build on existing systems and partnerships.

Senate Bill 257 establishes SCOPE as a one-year pilot program and includes a five hundred-thousand-dollar appropriation to support its implementation. At the conclusion of the year, the Department of Health and the Department of Behavioral Health will conduct a study to evaluate the program's impact. The goal of this study is to better understand the mental and emotional health needs of children with medical handicaps and their families and to guide future improvements in care and policy.

This bill is about meeting families where they are. It's about recognizing that health care is not complete without mental health care, and that families managing a child's serious illness should not have to fight a separate battle to access emotional support.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.