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Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Substitute Senate Bill 314, the Ohio Dementia Training Act. This legislation addresses a critical need in the care of older Ohioans by requiring annual dementia training for Certified Nursing Aides working in long-term care facilities.

Ohio's long-term care facilities are caring for a rapidly growing number of residents living with Alzheimer's Disease and other forms of Dementia, making dementia-specific training for nursing aides increasingly essential. More than 236,000 Ohioans age 65 and older are currently living with Alzheimer's disease, and Ohio has nearly 960 nursing homes — the third-largest number of nursing homes in the United States. Nationally, nearly half of nursing home residents are living with some form of dementia. Nursing aides across Ohio routinely care for residents experiencing memory loss, confusion, wandering, agitation, and communication difficulties. In response to concerns about long-term care quality, Governor Mike DeWine established the Nursing Home Quality and Accountability Task Force in 2023. The Task Force specifically identified dementia training for nurse aides as an "Immediate Action" recommendation to improve resident safety, quality of life, and staff preparedness.

This bill would require annual dementia-specific education for nurse aids who provide care to residents with cognitive impairments. Dementia care requires specialized skills beyond standard nurse aide training in order to provide compassionate, effective care for these vulnerable individuals. The training would include communication techniques, person-centered care, behavioral symptom management, understanding dementia progression, and residents' rights. The bill also directs the Ohio Department of Health to approve evidence-based dementia education programs, including accredited online and in-person courses and programs endorsed by recognized organizations such as the Alzheimer's Association. These provisions recognize that nursing aides are often the frontline caregivers in long-term care facilities and are responsible for managing behaviors such as agitation, fear, wandering, and resistance to care in ways that preserve residents' dignity and reduce unnecessary reliance on restraints or sedating medications.

Expanding dementia training is also critical to supporting Ohio's long-term care workforce and improving facility quality outcomes. Ohio facilities continue to face significant staffing shortages and high turnover among direct-care workers, challenges that become even more difficult when staff feel unprepared to manage dementia-related behaviors. The Task Force concluded that stronger education and competency standards for nurse aids could improve workplace safety, reduce caregiver burnout, and enhance quality of care for residents and families. As Ohio's elderly population continues to grow, implementing comprehensive dementia training for nursing aides will be essential to ensuring that long-term care facilities can provide compassionate, evidence-based, and resident-centered care for some of the state's most vulnerable individuals.

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