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Interested Party Testimony on Ohio Senate Bill 35

Submitted by the University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee
Chair Nathan Manning
May 7, 2025

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Reynolds, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 35. My name is Dr. Kara Ayers, and I serve as Associate Director of the University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCCEDD). UCCEDD leverages research, training, and partnerships to expand opportunities and improve outcomes for people with developmental disabilities and their families across the state. We submit this testimony as an **interested party** to affirm the value of supported decision-making (SDM) as outlined in SB 35, to share our experience in its implementation, and to address several misunderstandings that have surfaced in prior testimony.

1. Clarifying the Role of Supported Decision-Making

SB 35 affirms the presumption—*already implicit in current Ohio law*—that adults with developmental disabilities are capable of making their own decisions unless otherwise found by a court. The bill introduces supported decision-making as a *voluntary* tool that empowers individuals to make choices with the help of trusted supporters, such as family members or friends. This approach reflects a growing national consensus that individuals with disabilities should have access to less restrictive alternatives to guardianship when appropriate.

Crucially, **SB 35 does not prohibit guardianship**. It simply provides adults with an additional option and encourages courts to consider SDM when evaluating whether full guardianship is truly necessary. The bill makes it clear that individuals who need guardians will continue to be able to access them through existing legal channels.

2. Our Experience Teaching and Supporting SDM

At UCCEDD, we work closely with individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to explore and implement supported decision-making. We provide education and tools to help people understand what SDM is, how it works, and how to customize it to reflect their values, needs, and trusted relationships. We also offer training to healthcare providers, educators, and legal professionals to ensure that SDM is respected as a valid form of autonomy.

Our experience shows that supported decision-making works best when families and professionals are equipped with clear, practical resources—something SB 35 helps establish.

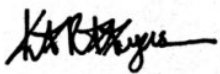
3. Why This Matters for Ohio

We believe SB 35 aligns with values shared across political lines: dignity, independence, family involvement, and responsible use of legal interventions. By offering supported decision-making as a recognized and voluntary option, Ohio can uphold individual rights while still protecting vulnerable individuals when needed. It is a practical step forward that reflects best practices in disability policy nationwide.

We appreciate the General Assembly's attention to this important issue and encourage continued bipartisan dialogue to ensure that SB 35 is implemented in a way that enhances—not restricts—choices for people with disabilities.

Chair Manning and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony as an interested party on SB 35.

Respectfully,



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