

HB96

Interested party testimony

Maria Sutter

Peer Support and Advocacy Specialist at Linking Employment Abilities and Potential (LEAP)

Chair Romanchuk, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and Members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide interested party testimony regarding HB96, specifically regarding Supported Decision-Making (SDM). My name is Maria Sutter, and I serve as the Peer Support and Advocacy Specialist at Linking Employment Abilities and Potential (LEAP).

Linking Employment, Abilities and Potential (LEAP) is an agent of positive change, working to advance participation and equality in society for people with disabilities in Northeast Ohio. LEAP's mission is to advance a society of equal opportunity for all persons, regardless of disability.

Supported decision-making is a framework that allows individuals with disabilities to retain their legal rights while receiving guidance from trusted supporters—such as family members, friends, or advocates—when making life decisions. Unlike traditional guardianship, which can strip a person of their rights entirely, SDM preserves the individual’s voice, values, and autonomy.

As an employee of a Center for Independent Living, I advocate tirelessly for systems that provide individuals with disabilities the opportunity to be recognized and participate in their communities. Supporting amendment SC1002 to restore the language from the as-introduced bill to include supported decision-making in Ohio law will provide greater opportunity for many Ohioans.

Self-determination is Personal Freedom

Supported decision-making reinforces self-determination—the idea that people should be free to direct their own lives, make their own choices, and accept the consequences of those choices, with appropriate support. Traditionally, families, service providers, and even policy makers believed the only way to ensure the health and welfare needs of individuals with disabilities were met was to have the courts to appoint guardians, but this is a myth. Individuals who use SDM may choose to rely on natural supports and community-based partnerships to assist them with finances, healthcare decisions, and applying for and managing government

services, to name a few. Although SDM is not appropriate for everyone, promoting SDM, allows more Americans to retain their personal liberty as well as reducing reliance on costly legal processes and long-term government oversight.

Promoting Independent Living

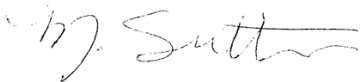
Supported decision-making is also a core tenet of the independent living model, which empowers people with disabilities to live, work, and participate fully in their communities. This approach promotes economic participation and reduces dependence on institutional care or public benefits, offering a more fiscally responsible and freedom-respecting alternative. For example, individuals who engage in SDM could choose education and training that leads to employment in areas of personal interest, which can improve employment outcomes. This is supported in a report from The Heritage Foundation that noted, “preparing students with disabilities for competitive, integrated employment is best achieved by focusing on the individual needs of each student,” and giving families and individuals true choice in services and supports leads to better post-school employment outcomes.¹

Conclusion

Supported decision-making is an alternative to guardianship, not a replacement, that allows people to retain their freedom, reduces government expenditure and oversight, and promotes community participation. I urge you to consider restoring language to HB96 that recognizes and upholds the rights of individuals with disabilities to live self-directed lives. Codifying supported decision-making into Ohio law builds a society that respects liberty and independence.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to all constituents' rights and dignity. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or concerns at msutter@leapinfo.org.

Sincerely,



Maria Sutter
Peer Support and Advocacy Specialist
Linking Employment, Abilities, and Potential (LEAP)

¹ Burke, L. M., & Boccia, R. (2020, August 12). *A Bright IDEA: Modernizing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to Meet Student Needs and Support Integrated Employment* (Backgrounder No. 3520). Heritage Foundation. <https://www.heritage.org/education/report/bright-idea-modernizing-the-individuals-disabilities-education-act-meet-student>