



Dustin McKee - NAMI Ohio
Testimony on HB 115
House Community and Family Advancement Committee

March 29th, 2017

Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair Conditt, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the House Community and Family Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 115. My name is Dustin McKee and I am the Policy Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Ohio.

NAMI Ohio is the state's voice on mental illness. The mission of NAMI Ohio is "to improve the quality of life, ensure dignity and respect for persons with serious mental illness, and to support their families." We are comprised of thousands of family members, consumers, advocates and professionals working together to ensure that Ohioans with mental illness and their loved ones receive the treatment and support they need. NAMI Ohio and our 40 local affiliates provide an array of free programs to communities throughout Ohio to support consumers and families and to eliminate the stigma of mental illness.

NAMI Ohio is integrally involved in efforts to ensure that people living with serious mental illness are not unnecessarily involved in our states criminal justice system. This is why we have worked closely with the Ohio Attorney General, members of the law enforcement community, and local officials to promote the spread of Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) trainings across Ohio. It is also why we are working closely with former Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Stratton as well as state and local officials on the Stepping Up Initiative of Ohio, which helps communities divert people with mental illness away from the criminal justice system and towards more effective and appropriate treatment services.

We are supportive of the legislation introduced by Rep Gavarone and Rep Wiggam to create an electronic method for informing law enforcement that they are encountering a person with a condition that impairs their ability to communicate. The bill ensures that the indication of such a communication barrier does not violate privacy by revealing the nature of the condition impacting their communication abilities. Participation with such a notification system is also voluntary. Both of these things are important because of the terrible stigma that still surrounds mental illness.

HB 115 will provide vital information to police officers that will help to prevent the unnecessary escalation of situations due to miscommunication that may be the result of the symptoms of mental illness. As such, this legislation is likely to help NAMI Ohio's efforts to reduce the number of people with serious mental illness that are inappropriately caught in criminal justice system. Doing so saves public dollars and reduces the suffering of people with mental illness and their families.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions that you have at this time.