

Community and Family Advancement Committee
H.B. 115 – Communication Disability
March 29, 2017
Testimony of Kevin Miller, Executive Director, OOD

Good afternoon,

Chairman Ginter, Vice Chair Conditt, Ranking Member Boyd and other distinguished members of the committee. My name is Kevin Miller and I am the Executive Director at Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). At OOD, our primary mission is to provide individuals with disabilities opportunities to achieve quality employment, independence, and disability determination outcomes. This is a mission statement that really hits home for me, because I am a father to a son with autism.

My son Connor got his driver's license last year, and as other parents in attendance can probably relate, I spend many moments of my day worrying about him being a responsible driver and staying safe. My wife and I have dedicated our lives in an effort to work with our son to learn how to interact with the world he lives in. That is why I am here today. We believe there is a significant opportunity to assist with our partners in the law enforcement community to better identify individuals who may have a communication disability.

As a youth on the autism spectrum, I know that Connor may have difficulty during a traffic stop answering questions or providing information to an officer. Behaviors that might seem suspicious for many people, like failing to make eye contact or short one-word answers, are typical for my son.

After reading several stories where individuals with communication disabilities were suspected of drunk driving or acting erratically, I knew Ohio must create a tool for individuals with a communication disability to voluntarily disclose this information to law enforcement. With the support of Governor Kasich, I met with Representatives Wiggam and Gavarone about the need and possible remedy in this area. Therefore I wholeheartedly support H.B. 115 and thank both of them for their leadership and partnership with our agency. Law enforcement officers interact with thousands of Ohioans all over the state in any given year. If this legislation helps to de-escalate even a handful of these encounters by providing officers with more information, it is surely worthy of our support.

I am proud of the fact that representatives from both the law enforcement and disability advocacy communities have come together to support this bill. I appreciate your attention, and as a parent of a son with a communication disability, I am personally grateful for the opportunity to support this legislation.

Thank you.