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The Rev. Marilyn Parker-Jeffries, Founding Pastor

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To: Mr. Dave Burke, Chair of Health and Human Service and Medicaid Committee

As a pastor, I can oftentimes be the first to hear the painful stories of my congregants, including the painful stories of the children. They may reveal their mental health needs within the safety of the church.

My church community has been an active supporter of mental health causes in our community for the past twelve years. I am writing in support of SB 126, specifically for the proposed language changes that will expand Ohio Revised Code 5122.04 to include children under age 14, who are now dying by suicide at double the rate they did a decade ago.

Senate Bill 126 can help our church members respond with appropriate access to treatment when a youngster in our care is suffering with a behavioral health need.

As a patient of mental health services for the past 20 years, I understand the need for early detection when someone is suffering from mental health issues. Through the benefits of therapy, prayer and reflection I have come to understand that my mental health issues were present as a child. Lack of understanding and intervention resulted in a journey of self-medication commencing in high school that could have been disastrous but for the grace of God. I cannot help but wonder what a different trajectory my life would have taken and the pain that could have been avoided if I had received a diagnosis of my condition of Panic Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Dysthymia had occurred in my youth.

Suicide is now the leading cause of death among Ohioans ages 10 to 14. I support expanding Ohio Revised Code 5122.04 to allow for children younger than 14 who may be suicidal to receive a crisis risk assessment, even if parents are not immediately available to provide consent. The proposed update keeps the important language for youth ages 14 and older, and also allows for a crisis assessment for younger children when there is evidence that the child may be suicidal. The child's safety and well-being can be assessed by a professional while the professional continues to make a good-faith effort to connect with the parent or guardian.

We cannot wait to respond to a child in crisis. Also, Ohio cannot wait to address a trend of younger people dying by suicide. SB 126 updates the ORC to make it possible to save younger lives.

Thank you for making this change to ORC language, which can help the caring adults in my church protect our community's children.

Sincerely,
Rev. Marilyn Parker-Jeffries,
Pastor, New Creation Baptist Church