



State Representatives Monique Smith and Adam C. Miller

Representative's Sponsor Testimony on Behalf of HB 363 Regarding Expanding Mental Health Services During Emergencies (As Prepared)

Thank you members of the committee, Chair Carruthers, Vice Chair Pavliga, and Ranking Member Boyd for allowing us to testify on behalf of HB 363.

The physical effects of major emergencies and disasters may fade with time, but the mental toll of these events can linger, sometimes for years. A victim of a disaster can face a lifetime of dealing with the impact a traumatic event. These events can also trigger a need for mental health support, pushing someone otherwise healthy over the edge.

Trauma resulting from emergency situations, such as acts of terrorism or natural disasters, affects us all, directly or indirectly, and can be devastating, according to the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care. It is essential that there is a plan in place for the behavioral healthcare system to aggressively respond to the immediate and long-term behavioral health care needs of those adversely affected by trauma.

Disasters can create an enormous amount of stress and anxiety for survivors, contributing to mental health problems like depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and, in some cases, suicide. Many people faced with a disaster will struggle over time and eventually return to normal. Others are not able to recover without help. This cumulative impact can affect an entire community's collective mental health. This can lead to significant long-term mental and physical health challenges.

A victim or witness of a mass shooting is an obvious example of someone facing mental health challenges. Some disasters are more subtle, like the current pandemic. This pandemic has highlighted how severe the effects of disasters and emergencies can be on people. It has demonstrated just how underfunded the behavioral healthcare system is as well as its lack of accessibility. A recent study showed more than 42% of people surveyed by the US Census Bureau in December of last year reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, an increase from 11% the previous December.

There are ways to build and prepare before traumatic events occur and combat the mental health impacts of these disasters when they strike.

This legislation calls for such planning in Ohio's state and local disaster response by mandating assistance for everyone affected by an emergency or a disaster. Everyone. And to target that care to the respective individual.

It establishes procedures for OhioMHAS and boards of alcohol, drug addiction, and mental health services to follow relating to providing counseling and other supportive mental health services. And it encourages Public Private Partnerships where appropriate.

It establishes plans and procedures for the department and districts to respond to and provide direct support for: Natural Disasters, Pandemics, Mass Casualties, Mass Fatalities, Mass Shootings, Declared Emergencies.

And it mandates that OHMAS directly provide and coordinate with state, local, and regional disaster response agencies and other providers to support emergency employees, first responders, victims, survivors, and residents.

Ensuring our state and economy recover from natural and other disasters requires us to ensure that the mental and physical health of our citizens also recover.

Thank you for your time. We will be happy to answer any questions.