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Chair Oelslager, Vice Chair Plummer and Ranking Member Crawley and colleagues of the House Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer sponsor testimony on HB 311 today. HB 311 would extend the Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) pilot project that is being managed by Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services for another two years, and to expand the program to include first responders, military personnel who have been the victims of sexual abuse and to fund a clinical trial to gain FDA approval to use TMS to treat Post Traumatic Stress (PTS).

To begin, HB 311 is a companion bill to Senate Bill 153, and there is an amendment pending to HB 110 as the language was amended into the bill in the Senate. The reason that so many versions of this concept are pending in the Ohio legislature is simple, TMS works and promises to help countless veterans and first responders across the state and eventually the nation.

I am happy to join joint Sponsor and fellow veteran Representative Miller as well as our colleagues in the Senate—Senators Hoagland and Johnson—who have worked tirelessly to explain this concept in the Senate. Representative Miller and I are thankful for the groundwork that has already been done, and we look forward to using this opportunity to lay the same groundwork in the House.

To begin, I would like to explain what Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation is. TMS was originally approved 15 years ago by the FDA as a treatment for depression. The patient begins by receiving an EEG, which can establish the source of the patient's depression. The EEG reveals that some part of the brain of a depressed person is "dark" due to a lack of brain activity. A neuroscientist can then target a magnet to stimulate that portion of the person's brain—sparking it awake. The treatment is non-invasive and can offer relief to patients for whom other treatments have proven unsuccessful.

Interestingly, a veteran with PTS will demonstrate some of the same EEG results as a person with depression as well as many of the same symptoms. While the symptoms and the side effects are similar TMS has not been approved as a treatment for PTS. HB 311 would change that by funding the first FDA clinical trial in the country. HB 311 would also fund a clinical practice which would treat veterans and first responders outside of the FDA clinical trial.

Two years ago, the legislature included a similar change in the state budget to fund up to 300 individuals for 30 treatments. HB 311 and HB 110 would expand the program for 600 patients. The bill would also expand beyond veterans who have been diagnosed with PTS to include veterans who have been victims of sexual abuse and first responders who suffer from "quality of life issues."

I would also like to address the purpose of the FDA trial. Currently, TMS may be used to treat PTSD as an “off-label” treatment. If the treatment is approved by the FDA it would also be covered by insurance. When that happens Ohio will no longer have to fund this program and exponentially more veterans and first responders will be able to take advantage of this incredibly promising treatment.

Mr. Chairman, some may ask: how promising is this treatment? For this, I would like to summarize some of the Senate testimony. Veteran Dirk Harkins told his personal story. He received an injury when he was struck by an IED in Iraq. He suffered for years and could not sleep or focus. His marriage was strained and he was self-medicating with alcohol. He eventually tried to commit “suicide by cop.” However, many of the local Sheriff’s deputies had known Dirk since childhood and were aware of the suffering that he was subject to. Dirk was detained by law enforcement officers and were able to get in contact with a friend of his who immediately had him sent to Texas for TMS treatments. After just a few treatments Dirk was able to sleep for the first time in years. He could focus enough to read a book and most importantly he no longer relied on alcohol to get himself through the day. Today, Dirk is working full time as a peer to peer veteran trainer for Ohio’s TMS program. TMS saved his life and his marriage. He is one of many veterans who testified in the Senate that TMS gave them a new lease on life including a Vietnam Veteran who had suffered for 50 years before finding relief.

In addition to the veterans, neuroscientists also testified in the Senate stating that they have never seen such promising results as they are with this cutting-edge treatment. And they focused in on the same issues—first comes sleep, and then focus returns. Once the patients can sleep, the other pieces fall into place.

Finally, I would like to point out why the Ohio program is different than other TMS programs—peer counseling. Every veteran enrolled in the program is primarily dealing with other veterans. The Ohio program also monitors vital signs. Each patient is given a watch that can read biometrics and sends the information to the program administrators in real time. This is important because many of the patients have addiction issues which may be revealed by Biometric data such as heart rate readings. The veterans who work with patients are interested in helping the patients, and the patients trust that. The counseling component, veteran to veteran, helps create the trust necessary to keep patients in the program.

As a veteran myself, I have firsthand experience and knowledge of the effects that traumatic events can have on those who have lived through them and their loved ones. Very often the internal battles that our veterans and public safety workers fight, through no fault of their own, spill over and begin to affect those around them. It is my belief that this bill is an opportunity for us to not only serve veterans and first responders but their families, friends, and community members as well.

In his Second Inaugural Address, President Abraham Lincoln spoke to a nation which was anticipating the end of a brutal civil war which was fought for the preservation of the Union and to ensure that there would be a new birth of freedom for all Americans. Having toured several battlefields of that war, the President was keenly aware of the many horrors that the soldiers of the Grand Army of the Republic had been witness to. Anticipating the consequences upon the psyches and bodies of these brave men, the freshly re-elected President told those listening to be prepared to complete the work that they were in: “to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.”

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on this bill. I will be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.