

HB 55

Proponent Testimony

Ohio House Government Oversight Committee

Kathryn Shelley

Chair, The Ohio Olmstead Task Force

March 25, 2021

Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide Proponent Testimony on HB 55. My name is Kathryn Shelley, and I am Chair of The Ohio Olmstead Task Force. The Ohio Olmstead Task Force is a statewide grassroots coalition of Ohioans with disabilities of all ages, family members, advocates, and organizations who advocate for the right of people with disabilities to live, work and participate in their communities. Formed in 2002, The Ohio Olmstead Task Force supports the 1999 Supreme Court decision, *Olmstead v. LC*, that states unnecessary institutionalization of people with disabilities who are able to live in the community with supports in place, is discriminatory.

We support HB 55, especially the provision which would allow that for committees, the chairperson has the additional duty establishing a means for the public, through the use of electronic equipment that is widely available to the general public, to converse with witnesses, and to receive documentary testimony and physical evidence. With our focus being on participating in our communities, the members The Ohio Olmstead Task Force would prefer, if at all possible, to testify in person. We do not want virtual testimony to replace, or be used to discourage, in-person testimony of those with disabilities. However, in situations such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, with many of our members being people with disabilities whose health may be severely impacted if they were to contract the virus, it makes sense to be able to testify virtually. Or, in non-pandemic times, testifying virtually can be used as reasonable accommodation in circumstances where travel will affect the health of individual, or accessible transportation cannot be secured. Furthermore, for persons with disabilities, travel can often take some planning – whether it be securing a transportation or securing a personal care attendant to accompany an individual. If an individual with a disability is unable to travel in the event that a hearing is rescheduled at the last minute, and/or travel to and from Columbus is not feasible, virtual testimony offers the solution of still being able to testify without having to travel.

While testifying virtually is not the same as testifying in person, with virtual testimony you can still see our faces and hear us tell our stories. Written testimony provides our words on paper, but virtual testimony allows for our voice to be heard, and is the next best thing to sharing our story in the same room as legislators. While I hope that someday soon we will be able to be in the same room together again -- testifying and being a part of making a change -- in the event of an

emergency or if an accommodation is necessary, virtual testimony is a positive step toward making sure all voices can and will be heard.

On behalf of The Ohio Olmstead Task Force, I urge you to support HB 55 in order to allow for virtual testimony to be permitted in the Ohio Legislature. Virtual testimony allows for everyone to be able to have access and provide testimony during legislative committee hearings, especially during emergency situations such as a nationwide pandemic.

Thank you for reviewing this submission of Proponent Testimony. Please see my contact information below, and do not hesitate to contact me if you have any additional questions after the hearing.

Kathryn (Katie) Shelley, Chair

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