

Good afternoon, Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the Health Committee. Thank you for allowing my sponsor testimony for House Bill 60, which would allow individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder to qualify for medical cannabis in Ohio.

When HB 523 was passed in 2016, it established legalized medical cannabis in Ohio. The Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program has since established the list of qualifying condition to participate in the program. Among [the list of 21 qualifying conditions](#), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was not listed. This legislation would add ASD to the qualifying conditions list.

ASD is a neurodevelopment disorder. Characteristics for Autism can include: a delay in learning to speak, an intense focus on interests, difficulties with social interaction, repetitive movements such as flapping hands or rocking back and forth, and sensory sensitivities.

Currently, no pharmaceutical pill can safely or effectively treat the core symptoms of ASD. Individuals with ASD are often prescribed a variety of antidepressants, anxiolytics, antipsychotics, benzodiazepines as well as stimulants in off-label, untested combinations to treat symptoms.

These drugs have serious, and fatal side effects & when given in combination, risk of harm increases significantly, meaning their life expectancy decreases even further when exposed to these medications. The average life expectancy for an autistic individual is 36 compared 72 for the general populous. Parents of ASD children are looking for alternatives such as medical cannabis to safely and effectively treat their children.

The benefits of medical cannabis for Autism Spectrum Disorder can include: reducing disruptive behavior, improving social responsiveness, helping to alleviate specific symptoms, and improving behavior in children and adults on the Autism Spectrum. Researchers have said children treated with either a whole-plant cannabis extract or a pure combination of cannabidiol (CBD) and THC have experienced significant improvement in their symptoms.

Parents have claimed it helps with impulsivity and short attention spans, hyperactivity, aggression, difficulty sleeping, and other associated symptoms. Cannabis oil showed, among other neurological benefits, vast improvements for social interaction and communication. One parent said, "My son is horribly anxious, but when we give him his CBD, he's cool as a cucumber. Usually within an hour, and that's the long end of it."

I introduced this legislation in the 133rd General Assembly after listening to the concerns of the constituents in my district because as their Representative, I work for them. Here in the General Assembly, we should be working to guarantee Ohio Families Come First. Our families should not have to move out of state to bring comfort to their child.

Seventeen states, Colorado, Delaware, Georgia, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Missouri, Maine, Minnesota, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Texas, Illinois and the territory of Puerto Rico have all permitted Autism Spectrum Disorder as a qualifying condition for their medical cannabis programs, pediatric patients included. An additional seven other states such as California, Florida, Oklahoma, Oregon, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Washington DC also recognize autism as a debilitating condition and allow doctors to recommend medical cannabis. It is time Ohio does the same.

What this legislation would do is simply add Autism Spectrum Disorder to the existing list of qualifying medical conditions for the medical cannabis program in the State of Ohio. This is important legislation and would provide an opportunity to help parents seek an additional treatment option to comfort their child in a safe manner.

Thank you for allowing my sponsor testimony for House Bill 60 and I welcome any questions the Committee has.