



Proponent Testimony – House Bill 281

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Mental Health America of Ohio

Dear Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 281, sponsored by Representatives Dontavius Jarrells and Thomas Young. Mental Health America of Ohio supports this legislation that replaces various terms in the Revised Code regarding disability and mental illness.

When you're told for the first time that you have a diagnosis of a mental health problem, it's hard to understand what all of it means. What does being diagnosed mean? Will I get better? What does treatment look like? Is there a cure or is mental illness a life-long battle? Does this mean I'm "crazy"?

The use of language is critical to ensuring a recovery-oriented and person-centered approach. It is important that people are seen first as people and not seen as their mental health condition. People are not cases or illnesses to be managed.

It is important to assess the way we use language and how the use of language either reinforces negative biases or promotes growth and strengths. It is helpful to remember that people often identify by roles where they find meaning. Strengths-based roles help us to feel better and promote recovery: "I am a mother, a sister, a friend." Negative language reinforces discrimination and isolation.

Mental Health America of Ohio is an affiliate of Mental Health America and our mission is to transform how people think about mental illness, make it easier to get help, and give people the support they need to get better and stay better. We believe in inclusivity and work with all individuals and their families through each step on the path to wellness, from making initial referrals, to providing free mental health services, to helping maintain stability and productivity once they are achieved.

We encourage you to pass House Bill 281 to ensure the Ohio Revised Code reflects the values that all Ohioans should be treated with dignity and respect.

Thank you,

Tonya Fulwider