

Testimony for Mental Health & Disability Terminology Act

Ohio House Bill 281

Sponsored by Ohio House Representative Dontavius Jarrells, D-25

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

I would like to thank Tristina Allen, Ohio House Representative Jarrells' legislative aide for asking Ms. Irene Tunanidas, President of Ohio Association of the Deaf, to have me give my own testimony on House bill 281 on Derogatory Language.

My name is Bobby "Joe" Osborne-Payne and I am a product of a deaf family from Newark, Ohio. I was educated in the Zanesville City Schools Special Education Mainstream/Oral Program then transferred to Newark City Schools during my senior year and graduated.

I consider myself to be a deaf gay individual, but it had taken me years to reveal myself to my family as such. Expectedly, it wasn't well taken by family members, understandably in part because my family was reared through church theology.

This was anticipated, however, what I was not prepared for was the fact that the wider community - even those who claim themselves to be accepting of diversity - actively participates in open discrimination against those whose sexuality differs from their own. The terms "fag", "deaf and dumb" and "imbecile", amongst others were uttered without thought to the possible consequences of my own mental health.

My parents, maternal grandmother and two sisters understood the basic human need to be loved and accepted, and so they decided to show others by spending quality time with me. In addition, they encouraged me and taught me how to ignore those whose words were poison to not only myself but to a large number of the American population.

If it were not for the support of the aforementioned individuals above, I would have joined my friends in suicide. As we all know, suicide is a resolution largely stemming from mental health.

Before anyone has a chance to point towards the Deaf community as an avenue of acceptance, please allow me to correct that misconception. Even within the Deaf community, there are derogatory names and comments thrown out against each other, despite the fact that these members of the Deaf community have known and do know what it means to be oppressed. How is it that the oppressed can oppress others? Where there is power, there is control; where there is control, there is corruption; where there is corruption, there is an absolutely free license to say what they want. The same is true for the hearing community, unfortunately, and all this must change.

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Deafness does not equal intelligence, nor is it a tool to measure the same. Sexuality does not equal morality, nor is it a tool to measure the same. Because of these terms now shown even in state law, that mindset bleeds into the opinions of lawyers, judges, doctors, first responders and civilians. State law is to lead by example, and including derogatory language against disabilities and the LGBTQ+ community is not leading by example. If perspective is to change, it must begin with the head. The body shall follow. If the head, the state, festers then the body shall fester along with it.

Our society needs to change its perspective of gay and deaf people. This can be done by showing kindness, according to Honorable. Dontavius Jarrells, "All Ohioans deserve to be treated with kindness, dignity, and respect. This legislation ensures the Ohio Revised Code reflects those values,"

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on the behalf of the support to change the terminology.