



State Representatives Dontavius L. Jarrells and Tom Young
Health Committee
House Bill 281 Joint Sponsor Testimony

May 25, 2021

To Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Holmes, Ranking member Russo, and members of the Health Committee – Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 281. House Bill 281 replaces derogatory language related to people with disabilities and updates statutory provisions relating to assistance dogs, braille teacher standards, the Children with Medical Handicaps Program, and accessible parking spaces.

This legislation is a comprehensive update to the terminology regarding mental health and disabilities in the Ohio Revised Code. To name a few examples of those replacements, we are changing terms such as “lunatics” to “incompetent individuals,” changing “deaf and dumb” to “deaf,” and changing “mentally retarded” to “intellectually disabled.” The rest of the proposed changes can be found within the bill analysis.

In the United States, 25.6% of adults have some disability. In Ohio, the percentage of adults with a disability increases to 26.9%. With disability as prevalent as in our country and state, the language used in official texts, such as the Ohio Revised Code, should highlight the equality and validity of those living with a disability rather than feed into stigmatization of the disability community. This comprehensive bill is a commitment to building a better Ohio for people with disabilities.

Before we close, we would like to pay respect to Representatives Jonathan Dever and Stephanie Howse, who started this work in 2016 through House Bill 158 in the 131st General Assembly, replacing references to “mentally retarded person” in the Ohio Revised Code. I now would like to turn it over to my colleague and joint sponsor, Representative Tom Young.

Rep Young:

Chairman Lipps, Vice-Chair Holmes, and Ranking Member Russo thank you for providing the opportunity to speak on behalf of H.B. 281, the Mental Health and Disability Terminology Act.

Thirty-seven states, including Ohio and the District of Columbia, have enacted legislation expressly intended to do what we are explaining here today. Additionally, at least four states currently have legislation pending that would remove the term “handicapped” from some sections of the law.

We believe this is a more broad-based approach for using “people first” language which emphasizes the individuality, equality, and dignity of people with disabilities. Rather than defining someone primarily by their disability, people-first language conveys respect by emphasizing the fact that people with disabilities are first and foremost just that-people. As referenced by Representative Jarrells, there have been efforts to update language in regards to mental health and disabilities in previous general assemblies. We request that you consider this comprehensive bill in its entirety as it is committed to the awareness of mental health and disabilities. I believe wholeheartedly that this legislation is imperative and the right thing to do.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and we would be happy to answer any questions that the committee may have.