



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
REPRESENTATIVE BOB YOUNG
HOUSE DISTRICT 36

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the House Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on HB 242, designating April as “Autism Acceptance Month” in Ohio. Nationally and here in Ohio, April has already been “Autism Awareness Month” for quite a while. However, at the request of the Autism Society of Greater Akron, Representative Weinstein and I are coming forward to present this straightforward bill to change it to “Autism Acceptance Month.” This change is also being advocated for by all six affiliates of the Autism Society of Ohio.

While this may seem like a small change, small changes can make big differences. We know that words, no matter how innocuous or off-the-cuff can be hurtful and harmful. We know that small words and gestures can also heal hearts. One of the best descriptions I have found of awareness versus acceptance comes from the group Autism Advocacy, and they write: “Acceptance and awareness come from vastly different mindsets. Awareness seeks to highlight how Other we are and emphasizes the differences and distance between our ways of being. Acceptance looks at commonalities we share and at the strength inherent in diversity. Those who seek awareness ultimately have the goal of bridging the gap by making us more like them...Acceptance, though. Acceptance says “you are you, and that’s pretty awesome. I am me, and that’s pretty awesome.” Acceptance seeks to meet us where we are, or at least far closer to equitably than awareness does...Awareness says the tragedy is that I exist as I am. Acceptance says that the tragedy would be trying to make me any other way.”

In the United States, 1 in 54 children are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, totaling over 5 million young people and adults. A formal federal and state designation increases visibility, acceptance, and inclusion for one of the largest and most diverse communities in the country. According the CDC, Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. There is often nothing about how people with ASD look that sets them apart from other people, but people with ASD may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from most other people. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of people with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged. Some people with ASD need a lot of help in their daily lives; others need less.

Committees:

Transportation & Public Safety
Technology & Innovation
Economic & Workforce Development
Public Utilities

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In the autism community, acceptance is often one of the biggest barriers to being valued and finding and developing strong support systems. Fostering acceptance is critically important to improve opportunities in education, employment, accessible housing, affordable health care and comprehensive long-term services and supports. Up to 85% of adults with autism with a college education are unemployed, and over 70% of adults with autism are underemployed or unemployed. Through acceptance, we can ignite the changes that create a more inclusive, supportive, neuro-diverse work environment as well as other environments.

I and Representative Weinstein find this an honor to carry this bill and advocate for these wonderful, talented, unique individuals. Thank you again for the opportunity to speak on behalf of HB 242, and I'd be happy to try and answer any questions the committee may have at this time.

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