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Ohio's 3rd Senate District

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Sponsor Testimony
Senate Bill 48
Senate Health Committee
Wednesday, June 16, 2021

Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 48.

This bill would require certain healthcare professionals to complete cultural competency training in order to receive or renew their license, certification or registration by the appropriate state board. Under this legislation, healthcare professionals will have to submit evidence to the board which they report to, demonstrating that they have completed training in cultural competency according to the standards set by their respective boards.

The CDC defines cultural competence as a “set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals that enables effective work in cross-cultural situations.”¹ Cultural competency has become recognized as an integral component of healthcare because of its relevance in treating patients and eliminating health disparities among racial, ethnic and cultural communities.

Racial and ethnic minorities experience higher rates of chronic illness, therefore requiring more interaction with the healthcare system. However, during these interactions racial minorities report experiencing less partnership with physicians, less participation in medical decisions affecting their own health, and lower levels of satisfaction with care. These disparities in treatment often lead to inadequate care, followed by worse health outcomes.

¹ <https://npin.cdc.gov/pages/cultural-competence#1>

This issue affects countless Ohioans, as minorities make up a large and growing portion of our population. According to a study by Georgetown University's Health Policy Institute, racial and ethnic minorities suffer from higher morbidity and mortality from chronic diseases, are less likely to have a regular doctor and health insurance, and are far less satisfied with the health care they receive.² And with more than 60 languages spoken in Ohio it is increasingly important to be culturally competent in order to better serve our state's residents.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services established the National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS), aimed at assisting healthcare organizations to make their services culturally and linguistically accessible. While most of the standards serve as recommendations and guidelines, four that are related to language assistance services are mandated for recipients of Federal funds.³ The rest are guidelines which the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recommends be adopted as mandates by Federal, State and national accrediting agencies.

Six states have required cultural competency as a part of their continuing medical education: California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, and Washington.

Ohio has made notable strides in becoming more culturally competent. Senate Bill 206 in the 130th General Assembly required the Medicaid Director to implement a system that encourages Medicaid providers to provide services in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner. Senate Bill 332 of the 131st General Assembly required each state board to provide its licensees or certificate holders with a list of continuing education courses and experiential learning opportunities addressing cultural competency in health care treatment on an annual basis. These efforts are a step in the right direction, but we still have a lot of work to do if we want to eliminate health disparities in Ohio.

In order to achieve health equity we must eliminate barriers that prevent individuals from receiving quality care. Requiring cultural competency training is an opportunity to assist healthcare providers in gaining the knowledge needed to successfully serve patients from all backgrounds and to eliminate health disparities among all Ohioans.

Chairman Huffman and members of the Committee, I appreciate your attention to this issue and I respectfully request your favorable consideration and passage of Senate Bill 48. Thank you and I am happy to respond to questions from the committee.

² <https://hpi.georgetown.edu/cultural/>

³ https://www.dhss.delaware.gov/dsamh/files/mod6_clas.pdf