

25th House District
Franklin County



Committees

Finance
Finance Subcommittee on
Higher Education
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Ways and Means
Behavioral Health and
Recovery Support

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DONTAVIUS L. JARRELLS

State Representative | Ohio House District 25

State Representatives Dontavius L. Jarrells
House District 25

Senate Health Committee
House Bill 281 Sponsor Testimony

State Representative Dontavius L. Jarrells

October 6, 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 today 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.

After the introduction of this bill, we worked closely with LSC, advocates in the disability, deaf, mental health, and victim services communities to make sure that we were able to address concerns of the derogatory language that remains in our code. While some concerns stood beyond the legislature, we have spent months to make sure that the Ohio Revised Code reflects values of kindness, dignity, and respect towards our developmentally disabled community.

Our Ohio Revised Code still includes language such as “idiot,” “deaf and dumb,” “mentally retarded,” “lunatics,” “mentally defective,” “crippled child/children,” and “derangement.” These antiquated terms are rooted in historical trauma, resulting in unnecessary harm for people with disabilities, their families, and advocacy organizations.

We believe when we know better, we should do better, that is why it is important that as we learn more about loved ones, neighbors, and friends who have disabilities, we must stay committed to making a better Ohio for these communities. Before we close, we would like to pay respect to Representatives Jonathan Dever and Stephanie Howse who started this work in 2016 through the passage of House Bill 158 in the 131st General Assembly, replacing references to “mentally retarded person” in the Ohio Revised Code.

Rep Young:

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for providing the opportunity to speak on behalf of H.B. 281, the Mental Health and Disability Terminology Act. This piece of legislation is a comprehensive update to the terminology regarding mental health and disabilities in the Ohio Revised Code. Just to name a few examples of those replacements, we are changing the term from “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.

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.