

**Ohio Senate  
Senate Health Committee  
House Bill 281  
Megan Burke  
Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition  
February 9, 2022**

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, my name is Megan Burke, and I am the State Program and Policy Director for the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition (MHAC). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 281, legislation that replaces terms in the Ohio Revised Code regarding disability and mental illness.

The MHAC is a statewide organization engaged in local and state level policy work, that actively advocates to increase awareness and improve the lives of those impacted by mental illnesses and addiction disorders. With over 130 member organizations located around the state and in our Northeast and Southwest Ohio Hubs, our diverse membership reflects the unique perspective of those working in the behavioral health landscape. In addition to mental health and addiction service providers and Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health (ADAMH) boards, our members include major medical institutions, for-profit businesses, faith-based groups, educational institutions, and government entities, among others.

We at the MHAC are strong proponents of HB 281, as this legislation eliminates harmful language that perpetuates negative biases and exposes Ohioans to discrimination. As the Ohio Revised Code stands, your constituents are regularly and routinely marginalized.

HB 281 reflects “person first” language and the concept of “person-centered” care. Put simply, the emphasis begins with the person, not his or her health diagnoses. If you were facing these health challenges, would you want to be referred to first as your diagnosis, then as an individual? Or would you prefer to be known as an individual who also faces these health diagnoses? The difference in language might be minimal, but the impact of utilizing person first language is not. It shows how you think about a person and can minimize the judgement they feel.

An example of this comes directly from a clinician and teacher who has had a lengthy career in the behavioral health industry. He recalls an incident when he used the outdated term, “MRDD” with a student. The clinician’s language resulted in the student feeling defined by their diagnosis and not their character. This student is not alone in those feelings. Each day, Ohioans diagnosed with disabilities and mental illnesses are harmed by stigmatizing and dehumanizing language.

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*Changing minds, changing lives*

HB 281 is a step towards removing the stigma surrounding disability and mental illness, and by supporting a change in Ohio Revised Code language, you can play a role in restoring humanity and bringing dignity back to affected constituents. You will be part of setting the industry standard, in ensuring that the language minimizes judgement and is inclusive and accurate. HB 281 will leave an individual feeling supported and empowered in managing their health, rather than isolated and helpless. I encourage you to consider this as you vote on this matter.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Megan Burke

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