



Senate Health Committee  
February 3, 2022  
Proponent Testimony on Sub. H.B. No. 281

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 281, sponsored by Representatives Jarrells and Young. I serve as the Associate Director of Mental Health America of Ohio, and we support this legislation that replaces various terms in the Revised Code regarding disability and mental health conditions.

The extent to which stigma and derogatory language has permeated mental health conditions is astonishing in comparison to many other areas of health. Some may argue that it's not language, but the care available that matters most. But we know that the words we use influence our attitudes, feelings, and beliefs and most certainly impact help-seeking behaviors.

When you do receive care, and you learn for the first time that you have a diagnosis of a mental health complication, it can be hard to understand what all of it means. What does being diagnosed mean? Will I get better? What does treatment look like? Will this be a life-long battle? Does this mean I'm "crazy?"

The words we use have a powerful effect on how we view mental health and people living with mental health conditions. We know that positive recovery is indeed possible. People can thrive in workplaces and in their families. The words that we choose are critical to ensuring a recovery-oriented and person-centered approach. It is important that people are seen first as people and not seen as their mental health condition. People are not cases or illnesses to be managed.

We can also look at how language can either reinforce negative biases or promote growth and strengths. People often identify by roles where they find meaning. Strengths-based roles promote dignity and recovery: "I am a mother, a sister, a friend." Negative language reinforces discrimination and isolation.

At Mental Health America of Ohio, we make it easier to get help, and give people the support they need to get better and stay better. We believe in inclusivity and work with all individuals and their families through each step on the path to wellness, from providing free mental health services, to helping maintain stability and productivity once they are achieved.

We encourage you to pass House Bill 281 to ensure the Ohio Revised Code reflects the values that all Ohioans should be treated with dignity and respect. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony, and I would be happy to endeavor to answer any questions at this time.

Respectfully,

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