

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Committee, thank you for this opportunity.

My name is Jane Gerhardt. I'm from Cincinnati and am the parent of Anne who, among many other attributes, has Down syndrome. I work for LEND (Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and related Disabilities) and the UCCEDD (University of Cincinnati Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities) both housed at Cincinnati Children's and have been with them for 8 years. But I'm here today as a parent.

Would any of you refer to my daughter as a Mongoloid? Would you say she's retarded? That she's handicapped? I don't think you would. Because you're all intelligent, enlightened people and you wouldn't intentionally be unkind. And you know that language evolves.

At one point, maybe even in your lifetime, these were acceptable words to describe someone with Down syndrome. But they are not now, now they're hurtful. People with disabilities and others in this community have spoken up and asked for change. We have asked that you speak to us and about us with respect.

Ohioans talk a lot about the respect we have for life. I'm asking you to change the language of Ohio laws to honor that respect we have for lives of people with disabilities. There's nothing political or woke about these changes. They make the Ohio Revised Code more consistent, concise and respectful of the 20% of Ohioans who have a disability or will have a disability in their lifetime.

Let me point out a few specific issues.

Is there any reason the ORC uses the pejorative phrase "abnormalities, defects or deficiencies" to refer to screening or testing genes for people like Anne, rather than the more precise "genotypes, mutations or chromosomal changes."? That's a change suggested in HB 281.

Is anyone really arguing we should keep the antiquated and demeaning term "crippled" to refer to children with disabilities? Because that's in there now and this bill would eliminate it.

As it exists now, people are "confined" to wheelchairs. Wheelchairs prevent people from being confined – they provide the freedom of movement. That old language failed to recognize what I am confident you see, that people with disabilities deserve to be acknowledged as important and respected members of our communities. Not objects of pity who are "afflicted with or suffer from a handicap." All language that's in there now.

Person First language – what we're asking for – refers to the person before the disability. It acknowledges that a person may have a disability but that is not the first or most important thing to know about them. It does not define them; nor should the Ohio Revised Code define people that way. Person First language is plain and clear, bringing consistency to what is now a hodge podge of dated and insulting terms.

Language is important. I'm guessing that every one of you had a moment of pride the first time you were referred to as Senator, rather than by your first name. There is dignity in language. I'm confident every Senator on this committee and in the state will recognize that this bill provides some measure of dignity, at no cost, to their constituents. I hope you'll support this bill. Thank you.

