



Adult Advocacy
Centers

Interested Party Testimony: HB 281 - The Mental Health and Disability Terminology Act

Good morning. My name is Katherine Yoder, and I am the executive director of the Adult Advocacy Centers. I'm here to ask you to support HB 281, the Mental Health and Disability Terminology Act.

In January 2020, the Adult Advocacy Centers led the effort to form a coalition of 27 member organizations from the disability and victim services communities. We drafted a letter stating:

We, the undersigned, are advocates in the disability and victim services communities. Together we are requesting that Ohio expand the work started by House Bill 158 in 2016, which aimed to replace references to "mentally retarded person" in the Ohio Revised Code. While that legislation was an important step, the bill was not broad enough, leaving behind many equally degrading and hurtful terms, such as "idiot," "deaf and dumb," "mentally retarded," "lunatics," "mental defective," "crippled child/children," "derangement" and "handicapped." These antiquated terms are rooted in historical trauma, stereotyping and oppression, which can easily result in additional, unnecessary harm for people with disabilities."

Many of the phrases included are words that no one in this chamber would utter because we know that language can hurt people. There are terms that we would punish our own children for saying, but they still exist in the Ohio Revised Code. Other phrases may not seem bad if you don't understand the context behind the words, such as "confined to a wheelchair." This phrase feeds into the incorrect belief that people with disabilities are helpless and have no agency. The phrase "uses a wheelchair" frames the wheelchair as what it is: a tool for independence that gives a person the opportunity to go out into the world.

This legislation is an opportunity to ensure that the ORC language upholds the respect and dignity of people with disabilities that has historically been denied them. I ask you to choose dignity and vote yes.

