

Good afternoon, Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee. Thank you for allowing my sponsor testimony for House Bill 60, which would allow individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder to qualify for medical cannabis in Ohio. This bill may seem familiar to you, as almost all of you have voted yes on Senate Bill 261, which includes the language of this bill. HB 60 recently passed in a 77-14 vote in the House.

I am going to begin with the inspiration for this bill, as it shows how impactful this could be for the 1 in 45 Americans who are on the autism spectrum. Three years ago, I received an email to my district inbox from a mother whose young son had autism. Tiffany contacted members of the General Assembly about the need for Autism Spectrum Disorder to qualify for medical cannabis use based on her and her sons own journey.

ASD is a neurodevelopment disorder. Characteristics for Autism can include: a delay in learning to speak, an intense focus on interests, difficulties with social interaction, repetitive movements such as flapping hands or rocking back and forth, and sensory sensitivities. When HB 523 was passed in 2016, it established legalized medical cannabis in Ohio. The Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program has since established the list of qualifying condition to participate in the program. Among [the list of 21 qualifying conditions](#), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) was not listed. This legislation would add ASD to the qualifying conditions list.

Currently, no pharmaceutical pill can safely or effectively treat the core symptoms of ASD. Individuals with ASD are often prescribed a variety of antidepressants, anxiolytics,

antipsychotics, benzodiazepines as well as stimulants in off-label, untested combinations to treat symptoms.

These drugs have serious, and fatal side effects & when given in combination, risk of harm increases significantly, meaning their life expectancy decreases even further when exposed to these medications. The average life expectancy for an autistic individual is 36 compared 72 for the general populous. Parents of ASD children are looking for alternatives such as medical cannabis to safely and effectively treat their children.

Cannabis' active ingredients are thought to exert their effects on the brain of someone with ASD by binding to proteins called cannabinoid receptors in the brain: THC activates the CB1 and CB2 receptors, whereas CBD alone seems to block them. Outwardly, this chemical reaction in the brain has been found to: reduce disruptive behavior, and improve social and verbal responsiveness, helping to alleviate specific symptoms, and improving behavior in children and adults on the Autism Spectrum. Researchers have said children treated with either a whole-plant cannabis extract or a pure combination of cannabidiol (CBD) and THC have experienced significant improvement in their symptoms.

Parents have claimed it helps with impulsivity and short attention spans, hyperactivity, aggression, difficulty sleeping, and other associated symptoms. Cannabis oil showed, among other neurological benefits, vast improvements for social interaction and communication.

This bill not only gives parents like Tiffani an alternative to a sometimes harmful and confusing array of pharmaceutical pills, but gives families more reason to stay here in Ohio. Here in the General Assembly, we should be working to guarantee Ohio Families Come First. Our families should not have to move out of state to bring comfort to their child, and we should do everything in our power to let those families know we want to make Ohio accessible to them and their children with ASD.

Seventeen states and the territory of Puerto Rico have all permitted Autism Spectrum Disorder as a qualifying condition for their medical cannabis programs, pediatric patients included. An additional seven other also recognize autism as a debilitating condition and allow doctors to recommend medical cannabis. It is time Ohio does the same.

This is important legislation and would provide an opportunity to help parents seek an additional treatment option to comfort their child in a safe manner.

Thank you for allowing my sponsor testimony for House Bill 60 and I welcome any questions the Committee has.