



State Representative Theresa Gavarone
3rd House District

Sponsor Testimony for HB 778
House Criminal Justice Committee
December 11, 2018

Chairman Manning, Vice Chair Lanese, Ranking Member Celebrezze and members of the Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak for HB 778, legislation that would increase access to state hospital beds.

I spoke with Wood County ADAMHS Director Tom Clemons in Bowling Green and then again in Columbus before he testified on behalf of my Opioid Data and Communication Expansion Act (HB 535) last month and during those conversations he brought up the issue of the lack of state hospital beds across both NW Ohio and the state. I had a similar discussion with the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities (OACBHA).

Mr. Clemons and OACBHA have been great partners while I have worked with them on several pieces of crucial legislation, so when they come to me with a problem, I take it very seriously.

Through those conversations I was alerted that state hospitals often have waiting lists for their beds. The people who need state hospital beds are, unfortunately, the most seriously disturbed. Private psychiatric hospitals are not equipped to care for this type of patient.

There seem to be two solutions for this problem: We can spend millions of dollars to expand our state hospitals OR look at the way competency evaluations are conducted for people charged with non-violent misdemeanors.

Currently, if a person is charged with a non-violent misdemeanor and needs a competency evaluation, the judge will often send them to a state hospital. A person undergoing a competency evaluation for a NON-VIOLENT MISDEMEANOR could tie up a bed for 20 days that should be used for someone with serious mental health issues.

Because of the current structure, somewhere between 8-17% of state hospital beds are taken by those charged with a non-violent misdemeanor. Mr. Clemons, OACBHA and other experts believe these people can be evaluated in a private hospital or on an outpatient basis, instead of taking up crucial beds in a state hospital from the people who need them the most.

Brett Johnson, CEO of the Northwest Ohio Psychiatric Hospital, noted to Tom Clemons that should this become law, around 10 beds would become available in NW Ohio. This would make a huge difference in bed day availability by decreasing or potentially eliminating the need for a waiting list.

This bill creates a win-win-win solution. By creating greater access to state beds for people who really need them we will save lives, reduce risks to community safety and save the state considerable money compared to the alternative.

Obviously, with it being this late in the General Assembly, I am under no illusion that this will be done in the next couple weeks and even if it could be I would hold off because I believe this is part of a bigger conversation we need to have about mental health policy in Ohio.

I would like to thank you Chairman Manning for fulfilling my request of a hearing for this bill so that we can get the conversation started. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the members of the committee may have.