

Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Slaby, Ranking Member Fedor and members of the House Education and Career Readiness Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today. Also, thank you to Representative Anielski for allowing LifeAct to participate in this very important process

As noted in Representative Anielski's testimony, after accidents, suicide is the #1 cause of death for adolescents, teens and young adults. The rate has been increasing for the last 10 years while virtually every other cause of non-accidental death has been on the decline. In our own state, in Cuyahoga County, the Cleveland Metropolitan School District reports the highest rate of attempted suicides of any major urban school district in the country. Over 21% of the high schoolers have reported a suicide attempt – that is double the national average. And for females, it is even higher.

It is imperative that everyone who comes in contact with teens and adolescents is educated in the outward signs of depression. This includes teachers, administrators, coaches, staff and most importantly – the teen peer-group.

As some of the most unfortunate examples of late indicate, all too often the people close to a suicide victim are left to say “no one saw this coming”. Usually, through no fault of their own, it is because they did not know what to look for, or it was hidden from them. This has been even further complicated with the introduction of social media. Not only is social media a new and very powerful way of cyber-bullying, but it is also insulated from causal view by those who are not included in the ever-evolving social networks. While the peer-group has become far more

important in this complex situation, we always will need the assistance of well trained and compassionate adults that can aid in identification, referral, and treatment for those teens in need.

The importance of understanding the outward signs of depression can not be overstated. It does not manifest itself like many other diseases or injuries. It can be internalized and not recognizable to those not looking for it. For most people (> 80% of those diagnosed at an early stage) treatment is effective and can change the course of their lives – and of those close to them.

We have had teens actually describe suicide as an “option” to resolve their struggles. We need to do everything in our power to insure that this is not an option and that these students in need get timely and appropriate assistance.

The passage of House Bill 503 will insure that all school personnel will be trained in the skills of early-identification for depression, mental illness and suicidal ideation. This is a lifesaving skill that is easy to learn, at low (or no) cost, and will pay a lifetime of benefits.