



John Eklund
State Senator, 18th District

Senate Building
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, Ohio 43215
Phone: 614.644.7718
Eklund@ohiosenate.gov

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Senator John Eklund – Sponsor Testimony
Senate Bill 143
House Health Committee
November 29, 2017

Good afternoon Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Antonio and colleagues of the committee. I thank you for the opportunity to give testimony on Senate Bill 143, which will designate September 25th as International Ataxia Awareness Day in Ohio.

Most people have likely never heard of ataxia, which refers to a group of rare and often fatal genetically-based degenerative neurological disorders. Ataxia is a lack of muscular coordination, which due to a number of related neurological disorders causes progressive deterioration of nerve cells in the spinal cord and cerebellum, the coordination center of the brain.

Ataxia is due to a gene passed from generation to generation, either as a dominant or recessive trait. Symptoms can occur at any age, but most often in ages 20 through 40 when dominant and during the teen years when recessive. Symptoms include a stumbling walk, hand incoordination and slurred speech. Symptoms progress over a period of 10 to 20 years, and patients may be confined to a wheelchair.

An estimated 150,000 individuals are affected by hereditary ataxia and sporadic ataxia in the United States. Ataxia can affect anyone. Support organizations such as ataxia patient communities Living with Ataxia, American Ataxia Networking, and Ataxia-UK have adopted September 25th as International Ataxia Awareness Day as proposed by the National Ataxia Foundation. Since there is no known cure, the only defense is research and prevention through education. SB 143 will assist in the Foundation's mission in Ohio. This was brought to my attention through one of my constituents and I am delighted to lend my support for this purposeful cause.

I have provided a list of what other states have done for ataxia awareness.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 143, and I will be glad to answer any questions you may have.