

House Bill 541
Proponent Testimony
Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee
September 25, 2018

Chairman Burke, Vice chair Beagle, Ranking Member Tavares, and distinguished members of the Senate Health, Human Services, and Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 541. This bill is greatly needed, as it would allow healthcare professionals from out of state areas to offer their skills and services at charitable events for the betterment of communities across the state of Ohio. Since I am not a healthcare professional in the medical, dental, or vision disciplines, I will be providing testimony from a personal perspective, that of having a healthcare need and that of volunteering at a charitable event.

First, let me address the healthcare needs perspective. In my 30 years of employment, the healthcare coverage available to my family has run gamut. I have had a full-time job at a non-profit, religious organization with no healthcare. I have had a full-time job at a small family business with healthcare but no dental or vision coverage. I have had a full-time job at a large manufacturing facility which provided healthcare and some dental and vision coverage, but a portion of the costs for the policy was borne on me, the employee. This list of combinations goes on. This example probably covers many of the folks that we see at free medical clinics. Others that attend are those holding down three part-time jobs without the needed hours at any one employer to warrant healthcare benefits. Many of these families are considered the “working poor.” Others that attend are elderly and/or retired and their benefits do not cover dental or vision. The self-pay costs for a dental visit or a doctor’s office visit or a pair of glasses is just more than the family budget can handle, and so many do as I did and go without.

Next, I’ll address the experiences I’ve had to date volunteering at free Remote Area Medical Clinics. I have served at two clinics in the state of Nevada and served as Co-Chair for the event in Ashtabula County, Ohio event. We had a gentleman attend the clinic that was so ill, he was transported to the hospital and later diagnosed with cancer. We saw children that had never had an eye exam and were provided their first pair of glasses. We saw single parent families that had not been to the dentist in years due to the lack of coverage and costs associated. Before the clinic in Ashtabula, I fielded calls from residents that wanted to know how many teeth the dentist could pull at one time, as they had several broken teeth causing them pain. I spoke with a patient who was in need of medical attention due to an in-home accident, but had put off seeing the doctor simply because his coverage is insufficient and the cost of the visit beyond his means. We saw a cancer survivor who needed treatment for new issues caused by her chemotherapy sessions. These individuals and many, many more attended our clinic in Ashtabula, receiving nearly half a million dollars in services—at no cost to them.

This brings me to my final topic. Without this legislation, it is extremely difficult to recruit and staff a free medical event such as Remote Area Medical. Even with much publicizing, educating, and recruiting, we often fall short in the vision area of the clinic. This greatly reduces the number of patients we are able to serve. In Ashtabula, we were unable to accept a dentist who was willing to serve all three days of the clinic, because he is currently practicing in the state of New York. We were unable to utilize dental students and their professionals from a school in Erie Pennsylvania, a mere 30 minute drive from our clinic site. Despite the numbers we were able to serve this spring, imagine the impact our clinic could have made if these professionals were able to give back to the community unencumbered by the temporary licensure application and large fees associated with the current process. Many of those professionals incur personal expense for travel, lodging and meals. They often close their practices for several days in order to donate their time and skills. Under the current legislation, the requirement for the additional application and associated fees become a large deterrent, especially when combined with the personal sacrifices already being made by the healthcare professionals. This leaves the charitable clinic understaffed and our most vulnerable residents unserved.

The need is great to be sure, but the willingness to serve is great as well. Please consider the passing of HB 541 to ensure that willing professionals can help provide quality healthcare on the largest scale possible to our residents that need it the most. Please join with us and Remote Area Medical to support their mission, "To prevent pain and alleviate suffering by providing free, quality healthcare to those in need."

Chairman Burke and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on House Bill 541. I am happy to answer any question you may have moving forward.