

## **HB618 Testimony**

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### **House State and Local Government Committee**

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Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairman Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee: Thank you for allowing me to sponsor testimony for HB 618.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding HB618. I am a licensed social worker and have 21 years of experience in social services. My areas of interest and employment include hospice, mental health, and community based case management. In addition to my formal education, I am also a registered yoga instructor with speciality training in trauma. I am also a donor fund advisor to the non-profit, He Who Laughs; Championing Mental Wellness. This non-profit is the namesake of my oldest son who died by suicide on 9.23.19. It is my hope that my experience, both personally and professionally, will be valuable in discerning how we move forward in light of these unprecedented times. These views are my own.

From the very beginning the State of Ohio's response to COVID-19 was flawed. Individuals in leadership positions demonstrated incredible power over the emotional and financial well being of our state. The overall wellbeing and decisions of our state cannot be in the hands of a single individual in collaboration with our Governor. This is not how the republic of government was set up and it violates the very fundamentals on which our great nation was founded. The rights of many have been violated in response to COVID-19 and my fear is that we are approaching another critical juncture. If appropriate use of power is not implemented, then I am fearful what the response will be from the individuals who are suffering as evident by the increasing rates of suicide and drug overdoses .

Small businesses cannot survive another shutdown. I, as a small business owner, strive and struggle every day to meet current guidelines so my wellness center can remain open providing mental and physical support to members of the community. My son's non-profit is part of these efforts to encourage and provide mental wellness to those individuals who are hurting, depressed, and seeking connection during these difficult times. These wellness services include yoga, meditation, massage, and other holistic

support services that can assist individuals in managing their emotional and mental state of being. The effects of COVID-19 on our mental health has been dismissed routinely by the Governor and the director of ODH. Suicide rates are increasing, specifically in rural Ohio, and most recently Franklin County reported for the second time since March a record high in drug overdoses in one weekend. In closing, I want to share with you some information from the AFSP. This information is specifically found for the chapter in Ohio and is current as of 2020, <https://afsp.org/chapter/ohio>.

- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for individuals 10-34
- On average a person dies by suicide in Ohio every 5 hours

Additional suicide facts come from the Ohio Foundation Suicide Prevention (OFSP), located at: <https://www.ohiospf.org/>

- 64.4 % increase in the rate of youth (ages 10-24) suicide from 2007 to 2018
- 48.5 % increase in the number of suicides by firearms from 2007-2018
- Approximately 47% of individuals with mental health diagnosis receive support services
- Every 33 hours a youth dies by suicide in Ohio

As these numbers indicate, people are dying and it is not just from COVID-19. It is anticipated that these numbers will only continue to increase. The WHO is predicting a million deaths from suicide by the end of this year. People are choosing to end their life in response to suffering that can be preventable, but mental health is barely touched on if at all by the Governor and the Director of ODH. We cannot isolate from each other and hope to maintain mental wellness. Human beings are made for connection, plain and simple. The efforts of my wellness center and He Who Laughs cannot be further undermined by leadership who abuses their power and fails to unite the people of Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to HB618. I remain hopeful that change can happen, and that hope can be restored to the fundamental pieces of democracy that have somehow gone silent since the start of our “pandemic.”

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