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2nd Ohio Senate District

Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 58

Senate Judiciary Committee

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Chairman Eklund, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Thomas and my fellow members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I am elated to speak to you today on behalf of Senate Bill 58, legislation that will increase access to state psychiatric hospital beds.

Ohio's six state psychiatric hospitals serve more than 1,100 individuals who suffer from serious mental illness. Hard-working state hospital personnel help these individuals through psychiatric crises to become stable and re-enter the community. However, state hospitals are not currently being utilized to serve the population that needs those services most.

Some individuals in our state hospitals are voluntarily admitted as a result of psychiatric crises, while others have entered involuntarily through a probate court order because they are a threat to themselves or others.

But a big reason there is a lack of hospital beds is because 2/3 of the current state hospital population have been admitted for forensic reasons due to a criminal court order for them to be restored to competency to stand trial. Half of those people are charged with a misdemeanor. Many of these individuals need a hospital-level of care; however, a significant portion, particularly those charged with non-violent misdemeanors, can be restored to competency outside of a state hospital. And, there are some who may need to start in a state hospital, but who could then be stepped down in the level of care as they improve through the competency restoration process, again freeing up beds for the critical needs of others.

In order to address the critical lack of state hospitals beds, I have worked over the last seven months with stakeholders in the criminal justice and mental health communities to provide the authority for both criminal and civil courts to pursue an alternative to sending those charged with non-violent misdemeanors to state psychiatric hospitals—the only facilities in the state equipped to deal with people suffering from serious mental illness.

Nearly 50% of individuals who undergo restoration are restored within the statutory time limit of 60 days, but are often released by a judge for time served without any connection to mental health services. The other 50% are not restored, but because these are low-level misdemeanors, they are released and unfortunately not connected to mental health services.

Unfortunately, this results in people going through a revolving door of courts, jails, and state hospitals without any progress.

A large part of the interested party conversations has revolved around the legal complexities, procedures, and resources required to restore individuals to competence outside of a state hospital, on an outpatient basis. Those discussions have been incredibly helpful and directly led to the piece of legislation before you today.

Chairman Eklund, Ohio doesn't have enough state hospital beds to continue the way we've been doing things—we can spend tens of millions of dollars to expand our state hospitals - but even then, are people getting the appropriate level of care to fit their needs? OR we can look at the way competency evaluations and restorations are handled to ensure the only people who are admitted into state hospitals are those who need the type of care that only state hospitals can provide - and then we can connect people to resources that are designed to end the revolving door of legal problems and keep people out of jail.

This bill does just that.

Thank you for the chance to testify on behalf of Senate Bill 58 and I am ready to answer any questions members may have.