



House Bill 428

Ohio House Behavioral Health and Recovery Supports Committee

Prevention Action Alliance

October 21, 2021

Good morning, Chairwoman Carruthers, Vice-Chair Pavliga, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the House Behavioral Health and Recovery Supports Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on House Bill 428, a bill to establish a commission to study Adverse Childhood Experiences, otherwise known as ACEs. My name is Fran Gerbig and I am the Executive Director of Prevention Action Alliance (PAA). PAA is a statewide nonprofit prevention agency based in Columbus, Ohio and has been in existence for over thirty years. Prevention Action Alliance is dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness. Our organization offers an abundance of resources, training services, grants and advocacy opportunities for those who are active in the prevention and mental health fields.

The term Adverse Childhood Experiences is defined as potentially traumatic events that occur before the age of 18. Research has demonstrated a strong, graded relationship between ACEs and a variety of substance-related behaviors and behavioral health problems, such as fetal mortality, prescription drug use, early initiation of alcohol use, and suicide attempts.

Ideally, the goal would be to fully prevent ACEs. However, to have a significant impact on a range of critical health problems that are associated with ACEs, it is critical to identify those who have experienced ACEs as early as possible to build and strengthen resiliency. For example, Ohioans could save over \$1 billion annually in public and private healthcare and related spending if just 10% of the cost attributed to ACEs exposure were avoided, 36% of depression diagnoses in Ohio could be prevented, and putting an end to ACEs being passed from one generation to the next.

As an organization, PAA supports strategies that focus on changing norms, environments, and behaviors that prevent ACEs from happening in the first place. By addressing the conditions that give rise to ACEs, and simultaneously addressing the needs of children and parents, such strategies take a multi-generational approach to prevent ACEs and ensure safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments. These strategies are vital, especially as we begin to see the lasting effects the pandemic will have on the mental health of Ohio's most vulnerable citizens. Currently, we are experiencing a record number of drug overdoses, increased use of alcohol, increased calls to help lines, and increased self-reports of depression and anxiety.

As someone who has worked in the prevention field for many years, this piece of legislation was exciting to see. Knowing the potential legislation that could form from this commission's suggestions is vital to the current and future lives of Ohioans.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions.