



**House Civil Justice Committee**  
**Scott A. Sperling, Psy.D., ABPP-CN**  
**Proponent Testimony on House Bill 439**  
**January 18, 2022**

Chair Hillyer, Vice Chair Grendell, Ranking Member Galonski and members of the House Civil Justice Committee, I thank you for the opportunity to speak in full support of House Bill 439.

My name is Dr. Scott Sperling. I am board certified in clinical neuropsychology and Staff in the Center for Neurological Restoration at the Cleveland Clinic. I maintain an active clinical practice, have several lines of federally funded clinical research, and am a devoted educator. In addition, I serve as Chair of the Ohio Psychological Association's Advocacy Committee, the Ohio Psychological Association's Federal Advocacy Coordinator, and on the National Academy of Neuropsychology's Policy & Planning Committee. I also serve as an expert consultant to the Council of Specialties in Professional Psychology and Advisor to the American Psychological Association's Office of Health & Health Care. In 2018, Virginia's Commonwealth Council on Aging awarded my work developing and implementing a statewide dementia care coordination program a "Best Practices Award". In 2019, I was awarded the American Psychological Association's Society for Clinical Neuropsychology Robert A. and Phyllis Levitt Early Career Award in Neuropsychology for distinguished contributions to neuropsychology in research, scholarship, and/or clinical work.

Through the above roles, I have obtained extensive experience and expertise working at the intersection of practice, research, and healthcare policy. I understand where the "rubber meets the road." I have carefully evaluated House Bill 439 through each of my professional lenses and with full confidence support the bill.

As you are well aware, legislative and healthcare policies are often fretted with complexities. These complexities can interfere with one's ability to step back and make common sense decisions that provide broad and significant benefits to the health and well-being of our communities, even when there is no appreciable downside. House Bill 439 provides such benefits in the absence of a downside. It provides a simple fix to a serious problem that is well-recognized by medical and mental healthcare experts and frontline workers.

At present, our laws actively prevent people from receiving mental health evaluations and treatment until they have deteriorated to the point that they pose a "substantial risk" of harm to themselves or others. At present, even when well-trained law enforcement and healthcare professionals recognize the presence of serious mental illness in a person, and in their expert, judgement expect a person to further decompensate to the point where he or she will soon – but not in that precise moment - present an danger to themselves or others, they are handcuffed.

They are handcuffed with the inability to have that person evaluated and treated by experts, thereby increasing the actual risk of harm occurring. Passing House Bill 439 would provide a necessary avenue by which people can access the appropriate and necessary healthcare services, at time when it matters most, before they present a substantial risk to themselves or others.

House Bill 439 will save countless lives of Ohioans. It will provide people with serious mental illness timely access to critical healthcare services, keep them and others out of imminent danger, and prevent unnecessary hospitalizations. It will take off the handcuffs of well-trained professionals and allow them to act responsibly, rather than stand by and watch a person deteriorate to the point where they present a risk. I respectfully submit that in no other arena would such inaction be deemed reasonable, responsible, ethical, or moral. We would not stand by and watch a person showing the first signs of stroke deteriorate, before providing evaluation and treatment. We would not stand by and watch a person gripping their chest in pain, to see if their symptoms evolve to cardiac arrest, before deciding to intervene. Ohio can no longer stand by and watch people with serious mental illness deteriorate, before choosing to provide care.

In summary, I strongly urge you to seize the opportunity to improve and save the lives of Ohioans, by passing House Bill 439.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Respectfully,



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