



OHIO **PRO**
Peer Recovery Organizations

May 25, 2021

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Hello Distinguished House Committee Members-

My name is Juliet Dorris-Williams, I am the Executive Director of The P.E.E.R Center, which is a drop in, wellness, recovery and support center for persons living with mental health, substance use and other addictions, and trauma concerns, here in Columbus, Ohio. Our name, PEER, is an acronym for Peer's Enriching Each Other's Recovery, for like all the people we serve, 100% of our staff, including myself, are people living in long-term recovery from mental health, addictions, and trauma. I am not here for my agency alone. I am here representing Centers like ours across our state, who serve, and employ hundreds of our fellow and sister peers. Collectively we reference ourselves as Peer Recovery Organizations, and I am speaking on *their* behalf, as a board director for our statewide advocacy organization, **Ohio Peer Recovery Organizations, Inc. (OhioPRO)**.

All Peer Recovery Organizations (PROs) operate under the same guiding principles of recovery. Our services are person driven, strengths-based, holistic, relational, respectful, and above all else hopeful. We call ourselves peers, because our life experiences mirror the life experiences of the people we serve. We have been hospitalized, institutionalized, marginalized, treated as less than. We have fought our way to health and wellness, with the help of compassionate clinicians and others in positions of power. Occasionally we have done this despite clinicians and others in positions of power. Because we cannot pay back the humanity extended to us when we were at our worst, we pay it forward with the work we do with others who are not as far down the recovery road as we.

Collectively, we are strongly in favor of **H.B. 281 the Mental Health & Disability Terminology Act**, which will remove all

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language from the Ohio Revised Code that is derogatory, disrespectful, demeaning, and dehumanizing.

Words like mental defective, deranged, handicapped, lunatics, mentally deficient etc. have no place in modern discourse where all humans, ALL HUMANS, have value and are worthy of dignity and respect. Human beings should never be referenced as a CONDITION, nor should we be relegated to certain categories due to our capabilities at any stage of life or development. We have names. We love. We hurt. We have jobs. We have families, friends and others who love us. We vote. When dehumanization is codified, like it is presently in Ohio Revised Code, it is like an infection that spreads across all aspects of our Ohio lives – codes, laws, polices and rules should be guiding lights – guidelines -- for those who use them. Presently, they say it is ok to treat, speak to and about, human beings that may be different from you, or have different capabilities as you. They say we are less than human. This language has no place during any time-period, but especially in these modern times. We are better than this. We have more knowledge. We have more science. Hopefully, we have more humanity. It is past time to remove this antiquated and despicable language from our public discourse.

We urge you to pass **H.B. 281 the Mental Health & Disability Terminology Act**. Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully,

Juliet C. Dorris-Williams

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