

**Ohio House Health Committee
May 25, 2021**

**Testimony of Luke Russell, Deputy Director
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio**

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and Members of the House Health Committee, my name is Luke Russell, and I am the Deputy Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio, often referred to as NAMI Ohio.

We are proud that we are the largest mental health advocacy organization in the country representing over 500,000 Ohio citizens and their families whose lives have been invaded by mental illness. NAMI Ohio has 40 affiliates throughout Ohio representing all 88 counties. Each of you have constituents with mental illness and their families who have experienced the stigma of mental illness.

NAMI Ohio is a proud proponent of HB 281. This is a major step in reducing institutionalized stigma related to those that have a serious mental illness and other disabilities. This comprehensive bill eliminates and modifies terminology in the Ohio Revised Code that many find offensive and out of date. Also, the bill replaces various words associated with people with disabilities with more contemporary alternatives. Furthermore, NAMI Ohio has been actively involved with the work group formed to look at the language in the Revised Code to help guide the legislation before you today. I want to thank Representatives Jarrells and Young for working across the aisle on this issue because mental health impacts people of all political, social, economic and culturally backgrounds

In closing, NAMI Ohio stands ready and willing to work with all key stakeholders to ensure the language we use and the actions we take foster an attitude and culture of inclusion. NAMI Ohio believes this is exactly the type of effort and cooperation everyone can support at a time when bring us all together is much needed.

Thank you for your time and attention today, and I am open to any questions you may have regarding the stigma related to language in the Ohio Revised Code.