



**House Bill 242 – Proponent Testimony**  
**Ohio House Health Committee**  
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**Cleveland Clinic Children’s**  
**March 1, 2022**

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chairman Holmes, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee, thank you for allowing Cleveland Clinic to provide proponent testimony for House Bill 242, which would designate April as Autism Acceptance Month in the state of Ohio. My name is Cynthia Johnson, and I am the Director of the Center for Autism at Cleveland Clinic Children’s.

Since 1998, Cleveland Clinic Children’s Center for Autism (CCCCA) has been a leading program dedicated to autism treatment, education and research. The center’s main site is on the campus of Cleveland Clinic Children’s Hospital for Rehabilitation, one of the few CARF - accredited facilities of its kind, with additional satellite sites.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by early onset social communication deficits, restricted interests, and repetitive behaviors which impacts communication, socialization, and behavior. We will see children at the age of first concerns; children who show differences in their development and behaviors characteristic of ASD. We work with families through our diagnostic clinic, utilizing evidence-based measures, to evaluate children suspected to have ASD. In a typical year, 600-700 children are evaluated, with 40-50% receiving the ASD diagnosis.

If diagnosed with ASD, we offer a number of treatment options including clinical applied behavior analysis (ABA) services, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. Individualized treatment is provided to children with ASD with a strong component of parent training. We also have a chartered non-public school serving students from the age of first diagnosis to 22 years. Tailored instruction focuses on development of skills such as communication, socialization and academics. Older students also focus on vocational preparation and transitional services with a focus on applying skills in the community.

To assist other organizations, CCCC A offers full-service consultative services to medical and educational organizations, both nationally and internationally, to help in establishing, or modifying existing intensive autism treatment programs within their own communities. Since 2007, we have helped develop nearly 20 programs across the United States with locations in Missouri, Kentucky, Texas, Alabama, North Carolina, New Jersey, Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Nevada, Washington, DC and Ohio.

CCCCA conducts federally-funded (National Institute of Health, Department of Defense) clinical research focusing on improving assessment practices and treatment for children with ASD and their families. Research studies offer families another option for receiving treatment and contributing to our knowledge in state-of-the-science care for those with ASD.

More than 192 children are diagnosed with autism in the United States each day. According to current research from the Centers for Disease Control, 1 in every 44 children born today will be diagnosed with ASD. With recent advances, autism is now perceived as a treatable medical



condition. The annual cost of treating and caring for individuals with ASD is \$268 billion. In 10 years, the annual cost is estimated to increase to \$461 billion.

Autism Awareness Month has been recognized in some fashion for over 50 years and designated by the UN in 2008. House Bill 242 can make a difference in the lives of the ASD community by moving past awareness to acceptance. For the thousands of families served by the Cleveland Clinic each year that are impacted by autism, awareness is no longer enough. By changing the designation to Autism Acceptance Month, the state of Ohio is recognizing the need to fully include individuals with ASD in society and embrace their human rights. Acceptance is also an important step to action, the action needed to achieve this vision of full inclusion, support and opportunity.

Again, Cleveland Clinic supports House Bill 242 and urges the committee to be supportive as well. We thank the sponsors Representative Casey Weinstein and Representative Bob Young for introducing this bill. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I can be contacted if you should have any questions.