

Written Testimony of Stephanie Leppert
Outreach & Advocacy Associate
The Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio

For H.B. 281
Derogatory Language
Representative Jarrells and Young
February 8, 2022

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing me to provide written and spoken testimony for H.B. 281 that would remove hurtful language from Ohio's laws.

My name is Stephanie Leppert and I work for the Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio (DSACO), as an Outreach & Advocacy Associate. On behalf of DSACO, I would like to speak in support of removing hurtful words from being used in past and future Ohio laws. As a person with a disability, I know that words can hurt and offend people like me. Derogatory words are not nice and hurt people's feelings. When I was in school, I had a classmate that called me, "retarded" and that did not make me feel good and it made me sad. It even made me cry. I think it is important to think about person-first language when writing and creating laws. Person-first language means that you put the person first before the disability. People with Down syndrome should always be referred as people first. For example, instead of saying "a Down syndrome baby", it should be "a baby with Down syndrome". I also want to share that it is inappropriate to refer to Down syndrome as "Down's". For example, "He has Down's".

I know that keeping up with person-first language can sometimes be hard if you are not a person with a disability or a have a family member with a person with a disability. If I may, I'd suggest reaching out to someone in the disability community to talk about correct language when writing laws.

As a person with Down syndrome and an advocate for the Down Syndrome Association of Central Ohio I hope you see the importance of removing derogatory language from any law from the past or in the future. People with disabilities all have feelings!

Thank you for your time today.

