

**Proponent Testimony to the Ohio House Health Committee  
HB 281 - Enact Mental Health and Disability Terminology Act**

**Kathryn Shelley  
Disability Rights Advocate, The Ability Center of Greater Toledo  
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Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony on HB 281—Enact Mental Health and Disability Terminology Act.

My name is Kathryn Shelley, and I am a Disability Rights Advocate with The Ability Center of Greater Toledo, a Center for Independent Living serving seven counties in Northwest Ohio. The mission of The Ability Center is to advocate, educate, partner, and provide services that support people with disabilities to thrive within our communities. We take great interest in assuring that people with disabilities are seen as equals in our community. Using language that is not discriminatory, derogatory, outdated, or ableist to describe disability demonstrates that individuals with disabilities are seen as equals. Therefore, The Ability Center is very pleased to see that HR 281 aims to change the dialogue surrounding disability as it is referenced in the Ohio Revised Code.

In the United States, 25.6% of adults have some type of disability. In Ohio, the percentage of adults with a disability increases to 26.9%.<sup>1</sup> Disability is the only minority population that one can become a part of at any time, and indeed, with the Baby Boomer generation aging, the number of adults over the age of 65 with a disability has become increasingly prevalent. One quarter of Ohioans age 65-74 reported living with a disability, and 48% of those aged 75 and older reported living with a disability for a total of 73% of Ohioans over 65 who reported having a disability.<sup>2</sup> Whereas in the 2000 U.S. Census, only 40% of Ohioans aged 65 and older reported having a disability.<sup>3</sup>

With disability as prevalent as it is in our country and our state, the language used in official texts, such as the Ohio Revised Code, should highlight the equality and validity of living with a disability rather than feeding into stigmatization and marginalization of the disability community. In removing outdated and stigmatizing language such as, “mentally ill”, “retarded”, “handicapped”, and “suffering from...” from the Ohio Revised Code and replacing it with inclusive, equitable language surrounding disability, such as “person with a mental illness”,

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020). Disability & Health U.S. State profile Data: Ohio. <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/impacts/ohio.html>

<sup>2</sup> Hemez, P. (2017). The disabled population in Ohio. *Ohio Population News*, 35. Bowling Green, OH: Center for Family & Demographic Research. <https://www.bgsu.edu/content/dam/BGSU/college-of-arts-and-sciences/center-for-family-and-demographic-research/documents/OPN/Ohio-Population-News2018-Disabled-Ohioians.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2002). Ohio: 2000, Census 2000 Profile. <https://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kprof00-oh.pdf>

“person with an intellectual disability”, “disabled/accessible”, “someone who has a disability”, Ohio is taking a positive step towards showing that people with disabilities are not only recognized but included in our state and its policies.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on HB 281– Enact Mental Health and Disability Terminology Act. Please see my contact information below, and do not hesitate to contact me if you have any additional questions after the hearing.

Kathryn (Katie) Shelley, Disability Rights Advocate  
The Ability Center of Greater Toledo  
kshelley@abilitycenter.org  
(419) 885-5733 x 120