

I am writing as a private citizen to testify against HB0132. The bill erroneously stipulates that a 12 year old child could be determined by a mental healthcare provider to have “the same capacity as an adult to consent to consultation, diagnosis, and treatment of a mental or emotional disorder”. According to the NIH, however, the human brain does not finish maturing until an individual is in their mid 20s (<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/the-teen-brain-7-things-to-know/index.shtml>). In boys, the brain does not even reach its final size until age 14. 12 year olds are not allowed to purchase condoms, cigarettes, or even call a 1-800 number from a TV screen. They are not allowed to operate a motor-vehicle, vote in elections, or get tattoos, because hundreds of years of scientific evidence and conventional wisdom have shown that children this young, who have in many cases, not even begun puberty, do not have the capacity to make consequential decisions alone, and do not have the self-awareness and understanding of the world to make said decisions without the consent of their parents.

This bill is also beset with simple logistical issues. Due to the fact our laws have determined that 12 year olds are not mature enough to manage money, it is prudent to question how the mental health services rendered to children without consent of their parents would be paid for. Would the mental health providers be encouraging children to steal their parents' credit cards and forge their signatures? Furthermore, if a child is diagnosed with a mental disorder, such as schizophrenia, which can require interventions such as close supervision, or even medication, it is blatantly irresponsible to leave parents out of the equation. While this bill stipulates that healthcare providers can *choose* to inform parents of a minor's diagnosis, it does not require them to. This provision has the potential to be disastrous. A child with a severe mental health condition needs the support of loving parents who have access to the knowledge and resources they need to treat said condition. As we all know, children, especially children who suffer from mental disorders are not always forthcoming about their needs, nor do they have the capacity, in most cases, to support themselves independently through a mental health crisis. It is dangerous to place children in a position where their parents may not know if they are suffering from a severe mental health issue.

There are certainly cases in which parents do not have the best interests of their children at heart and may not provide the support the child needs, however, if a parent is truly negligent and/or abusive, mental health professionals may contact social services and work to help the child find alternative placement in a foster home or with an adoptive family. The solution to this problem is *not* to give children as young as 12, especially children who may have mental disorders, the autonomy to hide important medical information from their primary guardians, who in most cases, know, understand, and care for their children more than any medical professional could.