



HB 49 - Ohio State Biennial Budget
Terry Russell – Testimony to Ohio House Finance
Subcommittee on Health & Human Services
March 21st, 2017

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 49, Ohio's state biennial budget. My name is Terry Russell and I'm the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio (NAMI Ohio). I'm going to be brief and ask that you consider two issues.

During my 45 year career as an advocate, Medicaid Expansion has been the most significant enhancement to treatment for the over 350,000 severely mentally disabled of this state. The people that I represent die 25 years earlier than the general population. This is not due to their mental illness but due to the neglect of their healthcare. These individuals are not lazy. They would love to work but the symptoms of their mental illness make this impossible for the sickest of the sick. Government has a role to educate our children and take care of the elderly and the disabled. No other priorities should be higher. Reducing the expansion is a death sentence to many of those I represent.

The second issue is about something extremely important to those that cannot live successfully in the community without a high level of support. In the 1960's we had 26,644 individuals in the 12 state psychiatric hospitals – one being my brother. Today we have 400 civil beds in six state hospitals. Where have all of the other people gone? I can tell you they are on the streets, in homeless shelters, living with families who are ill-equipped to deal with their symptoms, in cemeteries and unfortunately 22,000 are in our jails and prisons. We have shifted from one institution to another.

Four years ago, you increased the Residential State Supplement (RSS) program that helped support individuals living in group homes. The resident pays all but \$200.00 of their income (mostly SSI) and the state supplements this payment so that these special individuals get the care they need. I fought for over 10 years because the Residential State Supplement had not been increased for over 20 years. In fact, there were thousands on a waiting list. The increase of \$7.5 million has given the severely mentally disabled an opportunity to live in the community. Before the increase, 880 individuals received RSS. Today that number is 2,300. Fourteen hundred severely mentally disabled – more than are served in our state hospitals – are now living quality lives in affordable group homes.

Two months ago, the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services implemented a waiting list for the RSS program. Earlier you heard from Susan Geary. The RSS program literally saved her daughter's life. I am asking that the state expand their funding by \$2.5 million per year or \$5 million for the biennium. This will allow 500 more citizens the opportunity to live in the community and save them from the Hell of living on the streets. Again, without this increase, citizens through no fault of their own who develop a brain disorder will die because of the lack of services provided to these special individuals.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.