



**Ohio Senate Finance Committee**

**Testimony of:  
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Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities  
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Chairman Oelslager, Vice-Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Finance Committee, good morning.

My name is Cheri Walter and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities. We represent Ohio's local Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Boards. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

I am here today to respectfully urge you to restore the targeted investments in the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' Continuum of Care Line item that were included in the House passed budget bill. The increase of \$27 million/year included in the 336-421 line item is designed to:

- Fund nine (9) withdrawal management/detoxification centers at \$1 million/year;
- Appropriate \$12 million to go to local Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Boards for the purpose of helping people access local services that are not paid for by Medicaid, such as the room and board for residential services, MAT for criminal justice involved individuals, quick response teams, recovery supports, etc.; and
- Fund six (6) mental health crisis stabilization centers at \$1 million/year.

As you well know, today's community mental health and addiction system is striving to meet the growing demand for treatment for mental illness and addiction. However, the demand has outpaced the supply. Ohio's hospitals, jails, prisons, schools, businesses, and other human service settings are experiencing the strain of an overburdened treatment and recovery system. Every sector of society is impacted by mental illness and addiction, and an increasing number of individuals and families are coming forward requesting help.

We just spent the last two days hosting Ohio's eighth annual Opiate Conference. When we started this conference 8 years ago, approximately four people per day were dying as a result of overdoses. Today, we're seeing eight people die each day in Ohio and I fear it's still getting worse. At the Opiate Conference, we heard from professionals and individuals from D.C. and Cleveland and California and Portsmouth, this problem is getting worse. The drugs that are available in our communities are stronger than they've ever been and deaths resulting from overdoses are still increasing. We can do better and we must do more. We need to ensure that individuals have ready access to withdrawal management services AND ongoing treatment services and recovery supports. If we don't find a way to provide immediate access to intensive services with a direct connection to ongoing care, we will continue to see the number of overdose deaths increase.