



Chairman Burke, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Cafaro, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to testify as an interested party of HB 64.

Good Afternoon, my name is Margo Spence and I am the President and CEO of First Step Home, Inc. I am also here as a State Board member of the Mental Health and Addiction Advocacy Coalition. First Step Home is a Drug and Alcohol Treatment Center located in Cincinnati, southwest Ohio. We allow women to bring their children up to the age of twelve with them into treatment. First Step Home provides residential, outpatient, housing and other support services for recovery. Since opening in 1993, we have had over 4000 women and 2900 children benefit from our services. Over the years, we have found that it is not only necessary for women to receive effective, evidence based counseling but also other support services within the continuum of care. Services such as case management, vocational services, peer mentoring, child care, transportation assistance and safe affordable housing. Over the past year, we have had to increase our housing units due to our clients not being able to transition to the general community of housing. We have created a campus environment where our houses are all within walking distance of our treatment building. What we are finding, even before we complete the renovation of a recovery house for our clients, the house is already at capacity before the doors open. The drug and alcohol client seemingly needs extensive supportive services than ever before. Any legislation that would create barriers for clients to immediately transition to recovery housing after

residential treatment would have a negative impact on access to care for other women in the community needing treatment. First Step Home knows the value of being a good neighbor in our community. We have certainly enhanced our community by investing major dollars into the properties we have purchased. In addition, we have been active members of our community council, Business Association and community events. We have a high expectation for all of clients and visitors to be respectful at all times. We limit activity in and about our buildings as much as we can to honor the private homes in our area.

Over the past several years, we have seen a significant increase in pregnant opiate addicted women due to Medicaid expansion and I believe women are feeling less stigma in seeking treatment. The elimination of Medicaid coverage for pregnant women whose income is over 138% would have a negative impact on women seeking treatment. Most of the pregnant women in our system are on some form of medication assisted treatment, subutex or methadone, to increase their treatment outcomes and for the delivery of healthy babies. In 2013, First Step Home initiated our Maternal Addictions Program and since that time, we have had 256 women enter the program and 136 babies born. Many of our Moms are referred by doctors, hospitals and other health care providers. In our community Behavioral Health providers and medical health systems have worked hard over the past years, to integrate services and moms feel safe to begin the recovery process. Any policy proposal that would promote Moms being reported for suspected or known drug use by their doctor would have a negative impact on the relationship. Moms would be fearful of being reported and therefor they would not seek prenatal care nor drug and alcohol treatment. The lack of prenatal care could increase the infant mortality rates in our community.

Ohio has made excellent strives in supporting and enhancing recovery services over the past several years. It is important that we continue to improve access for care, provide a full continuum of recovery

services for those in need of treatment and provide support rather than barriers for those needing treatment. Chairman Burke and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for your time and attention, today.

