

## **Ohio Senate Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee**

**Testimony of:  
Cindy Heitman and Brittany Walther  
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*Cindy* - Chairman Hackett, Vice-Chair Tavares, and members of the Senate Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee, good morning.

My name is Cindy Heitman and I'm here today with my daughter Britt. We are here to talk with you about our experiences and the importance of access to appropriate healthcare services.

I'm going to briefly share some information from the perspective of a mother and then Britt will share her story.

Britt is an amazing kid that has had many lumps in the road but keeps moving forward. But I am Mom so of course I think she is awesome.

Britt's father was a race car driver who raced in the Indy 500. He experienced horrible pain following an accident and became addicted to pain medications and eventually heroin. He was in and out of treatment and we experienced episodes where he would be clean and sober for several years. However, when he was using he created a very unhealthy environment for himself, his family, and maybe most importantly, his daughter. His drug use resulted in years of fear, court battles, and disruption to our lives. Britt experienced trauma at a very young age together, we have learned to overcome.

Britt's mental illness diagnosis is Bipolar, chronic depression, anxiety, ADHD and PTSD. She has been under the care of a psychiatrist since age of 6 and spent 9.5 years in therapy. She also has three chronic physical issues. She has Undifferentiated Connective Tissue Disorder, Raynaud's, Scleroderma and Dysautonomia with tachycardia. She has had 6 surgeries. Britt is under constant care of her doctors at Cincinnati Children's and her primary care. She recently was at the Cleveland Clinic to see doctors and have dozens of tests. She will be returning there in July. Britt is on chemo and will be for another 18 months. Her Scleroderma has gotten worse, they just had to increase her chemo last week.

Brittany has been on Ohio Medicaid - CareSource - since she was about 5. Senators, without her health coverage through Medicaid, my daughter would not be able to have the care and treatments that she needs.

I tried private insurance but I could not afford the premiums and copays. The doctor bills were just overwhelming. I have also experienced depression and sought help. Today, I work as a Peer Recovery Supporter and I have the privilege to walk with many folks through their recovery journey.

I am grateful that there is Ohio Medicaid every time we get a prescription filled or visit the doctor or hospital. I stand before you today as a mother, urging you to make sure that my daughter and others in Ohio like my daughter who need access to critical health services, are able to continue accessing them. Britt does not access Medicaid coverage through the expansion, but many individuals do and many mothers continue to do what I do to love their children and help them cope, help them find peace, and offer support and encouragement.

*Britt* - Good morning Chairman Hackett, Vice-Chair Tavares and members of the Committee, my name is Brittany Walther.

You've heard from my mom about a number of my health conditions and now I'm going to share some of my story. I think school was the hardest thing for me. Trying to fit in and make friends was even harder. Just not knowing where you fit in is hard. Not only was it the social part of school that was hard, but the academics. Teachers told me I was stupid, that I needed to suck it up and just do the work. They didn't understand how hard my mom and I would sit at the kitchen table and try to do the homework. Crying and fighting because I didn't understand the work. Things started to change for me the first summer I went to a horse ranch camp.

Riding was the most incredible thing I had ever experienced. My first horse, Vinnie, taught me so much. He taught me to never give up and to persevere. Vinnie died when I was in high school, 10 days after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Everything that had meaning, everything that I was sure of was gone in the blink of an eye. Ten days later, I got the news that my father had passed away. I didn't want to believe it was true. Trying to pick myself up off the ground after one death then another just 10 days apart was a nightmare. I hadn't seen or spoken to my father in five years. Thinking to myself, what if I had done things different. All the unanswered questions I have. It makes things even harder. If it wasn't for the help and support of my mom, teachers, and friends, I wouldn't be where I am today. But more than that, I think being an equestrian was the biggest part in it all. It taught me discipline and life skills to work hard and push myself.

I am still an active equestrian. In fact, I was accepted to an all equestrian college but was unable to attend because I was diagnosed with an auto-immune disease, undifferentiated connective tissue disease, Scleroderma, and dysautonomia when I was a senior in high school. My health conditions and my experiences have caused a number of challenges in my life, but at each point, even when I thought my life was over, I knew I had the strength to overcome. To this day, I do weekly therapy with my horse Miss Satin.

I also have a support dog, Gracie. She is the best dog a girl could ask for and she helps me every day.

I'm thankful for my health coverage and the access to care that I have today. Life gives you all kinds of obstacles and sometimes it seems absolutely impossible to overcome them. But it's not.

*Cindy* – As you can see, Britt is an incredible young lady with amazing potential. She has experienced a lot in her young life, but she continues to push through. As her mother, I'm so proud. As an advocate, I ask that you continue to make sure that Britt, and others like Britt are able to access the care and support they need.

As we conclude our comments, we want to thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, we will be happy to answer any questions you may have.