



Ohio House Finance Committee

**Testimony of:
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Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities
May 6, 2019**

Chairman Oelslager, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the Finance Committee thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

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.

We want to thank you for supporting and continuing the investments in community mental health and addiction services. 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 continued to outpace 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.

With appropriate treatment and support, people can and do recover. As demand continues to surge, communities must ensure the existence of a full scope of care within the local Recovery-Oriented System of Care. As we look to support local Boards and communities as they develop, promote, fund, and provide prevention, treatment, and recovery supports and services we must sustain the investments in community mental health and addiction services.

We are encouraged by the investments included in this budget by Governor DeWine's Administration and the support put forward by the Ohio House of Representatives. The sustained investments in the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' line items with the increased investments in crisis services and the crisis infrastructure will allow communities to preserve and expand the crisis services that are available throughout Ohio.

We are concerned by the earmarks for specific local community programs included in the 336-421 line item totaling \$600,000 per year, the 336-643 line item totaling \$1.25 million over the biennium, the 336-504 line item totaling \$600,000 per year, and the 336-406 line item totaling \$120,000 per year. Our Association has historically been opposed to program specific earmarks as we believe the funds put forward by the Ohio General Assembly should be allocated to local Boards to allow them to plan for and meet local needs.

Representatives, we appreciate these increased investments. Local Boards need more sustainable and flexible resources to meet local needs. These flexible investments directed to Boards allow them to support the firehouse model to ensure that crisis services are available and accessible when and where a client needs them. These funds also support critical prevention and recovery support activities and services that are not often covered by traditional healthcare payers. In order to truly support the growing number of Ohioans who are accessing mental health and addiction services, we must ensure our systems of care are comprehensive, stable, viable, and accessible.

We also encourage you to incorporate an amendment to ORC 340.03 to update the language related to the role of local Boards as the community planning agency for mental health and addiction to incorporate their role as the local Recovery-Oriented System of Care hub. This amendment updates the revised code to reflect what Boards are currently doing in their communities to comprehensively address mental health and addiction needs.

Proposed language - ORC 340.03 (A)(1) “Serve as both the community addiction and mental health planning agency and the recovery-oriented system of care hub for the county or counties under its jurisdiction.”

I want to thank you again for your support of mental health and addiction services and your focus on helping Ohioans with mental illness and addiction. Should you have any questions about this testimony, please contact me at cwalter@oacbha.org or (614)224-1111.