



## Robert F. Spada Testimony

Ohio Senate Finance Sub-Committee on Health and Medicaid  
Wednesday, May 15, 2019

**Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Minority Member Thomas** and members of the Ohio Senate Finance **Sub-Committee on Health and Medicaid**, my name is Bob Spada and for 10 years, I served here in the Senate. For that reason alone, I know how difficult your job is to develop a budget that satisfies so many special interest groups.

I am here today to **advocate for persons with a mental illness and their families.**

My awakening was on **Labor Day weekend in 2004**, about 11 PM, **Sunday evening** when I received a call from the girl my son was visiting in Dallas, Texas. **Her family thought he was on drugs and had him taken to the hospital. What had happened to my 23 year old son?** Why is he in the emergency room in Dallas? I did not know what to think. I did know I that I had to be with him in Texas.

Over the next few hours all kinds of things went through my mind as I was making my plane reservations and trying to get to the airport for my 7 AM flight to Texas.

When I got to **Dallas, I found that his blood test did not show any illegal drugs and he was taken to a psychiatric hospital in Plano, Texas.**

I called my Senate office and told **Caryl Philips** of my son's illness. I do not know how she could have understood me for I cried a lot those few days. **I thank God to this day that she took care of things and had an appointment for me and my son the day we arrived back in Cleveland to see Dr. Pedro Delgado, the Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at University Hospitals.**

I often wonder what people who do not have an experienced Administrative Assistant do? **How do they know what steps to take?** I am also thankful for NAMI. The personal care and education including the Family to Family course was the best anyone could ask for.

If it wasn't for my position in the Senate, I don't know what would have happened to my son. **Because I had friends at the University Hospitals and at NAMI, my son quickly got the care he needed.** I am so proud of who he is today and **I can say that treatment works.** He went on to get a **master's degree** and last year passed the **CPA exam.**

Because of my experience, I became very active in the **National Alliance on Mental Illness** movement. I became **President of NAMI Ohio** and was elected to the **national NAMI board and became their Treasurer.**



During this last election, NAMI Ohio talked to both gubernatorial candidates urging them to address the issue of kids in our communities not receiving mental health care. **Half of all life-time mental health conditions begin by age 14 and 75% by age 24.** We know early intervention programs can help.

**Ninety percent of those who die by suicide have an underlying mental illness.**

**Common barriers to treatment** include the **cost of mental health care** and **insurance, prejudice and discrimination.**

**Only 25% of kids with a diagnosable mental illness receive any care at all.**

When we met with Governor DeWine's staff prior to the election, we stated that **we must break the cycle where kids who live in trauma and those who develop mental illness get care immediately.**

The only way to do this is to have **people in the schools who identify and intervene with children showing signs of mental illness or addiction.** Current school counselors are there for academics.

The young **man in Florida who killed 19 students was identified early.** The response was to **take away his backpack and expel him** for a few days.

Last week the **Colorado high school student shooters were said to have psychological problems. We can do better.**

Until recently, the **schools have stated, "it is our job to educate"**.

**Now, they are seeing it is impossible to educate students with behavioral health problems.**

**It is also impossible for other kids to learn while in classrooms with other kids needing help.**

The **Governor followed NAMI Ohio's advice and put \$675 million in the budget for mental health professionals in every school.**

**The House was so supportive of this, they added an additional \$125 million over the biennium for schools to support student wellness and success in schools.**

Schools will receive additional funding for mental health **counseling, wrap around supports, mentoring, and after school programs.**

**NAMI Ohio believes this action will lessen the need to serve many adults in future generations.**



**With this initiative, we will be breaking the cycle of unmet need for our most vulnerable citizens – our kids. I can think of no priority more important in this whole budget than the funds in the Governor’s budget for kids.**

Thank you.

I would be pleased to address any questions.