

Testimony for Public Hearing

Senate Finance Committee

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Senate Finance Committee for the Purpose of Fiscal Year 20 and 21 Budget

I would like to thank you Chairman Dolan, Vice Chairman Burke, and members of the Ohio Senate finance committee for allowing me to testify before you today. My name is Kyle Clark I have been in education for 45 years serving youth as a teacher, principal, school superintendent and prevention education director. Currently as the Prevention Education Director for the Wood County Educational Service Center I supervise the administration of school-based prevention education services to nine school districts and one vocational career center. Our services include programs and initiatives that assist school districts in Wood County to address at-risk behaviors in school age youth. Programs and initiatives include: bullying prevention, Substance abuse (Tobacco, alcohol, and other drug ATOD) prevention, teen dating violence prevention, youth violence prevention, gambling prevention and mental health education. I am asking the Senate to restore the K-12 prevention education funding to the level of the House and Executive versions of the budget.

Since 2003 The Wood County Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Services Board (ADAMHS) of Wood County, Ohio has supported school-based, evidenced-based, prevention education programs in Wood County schools, by partnering with the Wood County Educational Service Center (WCESC). What started out in 2003 as only a few programs in limited grade levels has grown over fifteen years to a total of eighteen evidenced-based programs that can be utilized over the entire Pre K – 12 grade levels. Programs can be presented in a stand-alone format or integrated into existing academic content curriculums.

Beginning in 2004, the ADAMHS Board and ESC developed a population youth survey to collect data on the effectiveness of prevention education programming for alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use from Wood County adolescents. In 2008, the Ohio Scales were added to assess the mental health of Wood County students and to demonstrate the relationship between mental health and substance use. In 2012 questions were added to assess bullying and relationship violence among youth. In 2016, questions were added to assess the type and frequency of adolescent gambling activities, including a measure of disordered gambling. Finally, in 2018 ten questions from the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs) study were added.

With fifteen years of trend data now collected, Wood County has reliable data to substantiate the correlational relationships between substance abuse/misuse, mental health, gambling, relationship violence including bullying, and exposure to traumatic stress. According to Wood County youth data

who have been verbally bullied 1-2 times are 25-35% more likely to experience mental health problems. Of those students reporting mental health problems they are 26-46% more likely to have suicide ideation and 10-20% more likely to attempt suicide. I can go through our research and make a correlational statement on any risky behavior that has been identified in our survey data.

The goal of any evidenced –based program is to educate youth so that they understand the effects of substance use/abuse, delay the onset of substance use/abuse, and build resiliency skills so that youth can make good healthy decisions and carry this skill into adulthood. Prevention education programs provided to the schools have proven successful in Wood County Schools. Since 2004, there has been a decline in all substance use in Wood County. This reduction matches the downward trend in the nation, but our Pre-k-12 school-based model shows a steeper and faster decline than the nation.

Given that today our biggest crisis is the opiate epidemic and that according to national statistics the average age of an opioid addict is 35 years old. That would place him/her in school back in the 1990's when marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco numbers were at an all-time high in our country. This was a time when there were no prevention education programs in schools and the only resiliency building in youth was the left-over Reagan era “Just Say No” campaign.

According to the Surgeon General's most recent report, substance misuse is also associated with a wide range of health and social problems, including heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, various cancers, mental disorders, neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), driving under the influence (DUI) and other transportation-related injuries, sexual assault and rape, unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, intentional and unintentional injuries, and property crimes.

According to national statistics every one dollar invested in prevention has an average return of saving \$18 in societal costs. In programs like the PAX Good Behavior Game that savings increases to \$64 per \$1 invested. Based on the average \$18 savings analogy the \$36,000,000 you are proposing to cut from the state budget could potentially cost \$648,000,000 in societal costs. When you look at the math, we pay a little now or a whole lot latter. Can we afford this mistake?

As legislators you have the opportunity to be proactive in reducing youth substance use/abuse, relationship violence, gambling, and other risky behaviors by keeping prevention money in the budget. At the same time you are increasing youth resiliency skills and improving social-emotional behavioral health that will carry over into adulthood and begin to address the reduction of opioids and other health related issues. I urge you to restore the prevention education money to the State Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony opposing the removal of K-12 prevention education money from the State Budget. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.