



HB 365
Proponent Testimony
Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee
12/1/2020

Chair Burke, Vice Chair Huffman, and Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony supporting HB 365. The Mental Health and Addiction Advocacy Coalition (MHAC) is a statewide member organization actively advocating to increase awareness and advance policies to improve the lives of those impacted by mental illnesses and addiction disorders. The MHAC's membership includes 125 organizations whose members exemplify the diversity of community organizations that have a common interest in behavioral health, including health and human service organizations; the faith-based community; managed care plans; advocacy organizations; courts; major medical institutions; the corporate arena; and behavioral health agencies serving adults and children.

House Bill 365 creates two additional alternative paths to become a Licensed Chemical Dependency Counselor II (LCDC II):

1. One option creates an intensive-practicum pathway for people who have already shown an interest in chemical dependency counseling. The practicum would allow for qualified people to become LCDC II faster, helping to fill the need in the time of the opiate epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. The second pathway allows for people who have a lengthy record in the field and the appropriate level of training to take the licensure examination without having a specific degree; however, this provision sunsets after three years.

There is a severe workforce shortage in the behavioral health field. The bill would help increase and strengthen the substance use disorder workforce as Ohio continues to battle the opioid crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic that is putting additional strains on the system. The behavioral health system relies on a workforce made up of licensed professionals, paraprofessionals, and those with lived experience. This proposal allows more staff the opportunity to gain licensure and help reduce existing shortages at community behavioral health centers.

During the recent Behavioral Health Redesign, service rates were restructured tying them to specific educational requirements and licensure attainment. Before the Behavioral Health Redesign became effective in 2018, the field was already experiencing significant challenges that have deepened because of these policy changes. This bill allows providers to retain more licensed staff and allow those with years of experience as chemical dependency counselor assistants to move up in the field by gaining licensure.

The MHAC has advocated for the bill's passage as a way to address the COVID-19 pandemic leading to increasing needs brought on by a surge in substance use disorder treatment services. While the pandemic has generated ripple effects on the health of the economy, among other things, it is also giving rise to a surge in mental illness and substance use disorders. New stressors due to loss of routine, separation from friends and family, loss of employment, financial hardship, and fear of the virus is increasing anxiety and depression. These factors brought

on by the pandemic are impacting people who never experienced issues with mental health issues before and are disproportionately affecting people in substance use disorder recovery, and people with ongoing mental health disorders. Allowing two additional sets of criteria to qualify to become a LCDC II by the Ohio Chemical Dependency Professionals Board will help address the severe shortage in the addiction treatment workforce and help with new challenges and increased demands for services during the pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kelly A. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kelly Smith
State Program & Policy Director