



Ohio House Ways and Means Committee

Written Testimony on HB 71

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Chairman Merrin, Vice-Chair Reidel, Ranking Member Sobecki, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee, thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 71. My name is Cheri Walter, and I am the CEO of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities. We represent Ohio's Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Boards.

I am writing in support of HB 71. This bill would codify the long-standing and noncontroversial property tax exemption for supportive housing options for individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders.

Ohio's ADAMH Boards are charged with ensuring the existence of a local continuum of care for individuals living with mental illnesses and substance use disorders. Boards do this with limited resources as they work to best serve their communities. Housing is an integral component of this continuum and a major area of investment for many ADAMH Boards. Local ADAMH Boards support HB 71 and the continuation of this tax exemption so that they are able to continue leveraging federal, state, and local funds to most effectively meet client and community needs.

If this language is not put in place, local providers of these housing services will have to pay increased taxes as a result of a recent Board of Tax Appeals decision. These providers would be forced to ask for more local funding, from the already limited pool of ADAMH Board resources, cut operations, or possibly consider closing. All of these options are far worse than codifying and continuing the long-standing tax exemption for these non-profit organizations that provide critical recovery supports.

Many ADAMH Boards also generate funds through local property tax levies and these funds are often used to support local housing providers. If this exemption is not codified, we would see Boards being asked to provide financial support to help housing agencies pay increased property taxes, resulting in an inefficient and burdensome shift of funds from one levy entity to another.

Housing is a critical aspect to recovery. Now more than ever, we need to focus our energy on keeping people housed. The entities that would be impacted by this legislation, provide supportive housing opportunities for individuals who are living with mental illness and substance use disorders. With appropriate housing options, individuals can more effectively engage in treatment and continue their recovery. If individuals with a mental illness or a substance use disorder lose their only affordable and stable housing option during this pandemic, they will likely end up in more expensive places like homeless shelters, hospitals, psychiatric facilities, or involved in the criminal justice system. This would be both the more expensive option and more detrimental for the health of the individuals we are collectively working to serve.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. Should you have any questions, please contact me at cwalter@oacbha.org.