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Interested Party Testimony on OhioRISE

May 13, 2021

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Testimony before the Senate Finance Committee on Health and Human Services By Habeebah R. Grimes, Chief Executive Officer

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee. I am Habeebah R. Grimes, CEO of Positive Education Program (PEP). I want to first thank you for your commitment to hear health and human service issues in this budget, and for your past support of programming at PEP. As one of Ohio's largest nonprofits committed to children, PEP provides services – both direct and consultative in nature – for children with autism, mental health and behavioral challenges, their families and the professionals who support them.

As you may know, in 1989, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) sought innovative approaches to serving multi-system involved youth (MSY) who were on track to deeper system involvement, such as psychiatric hospitalizations and residential treatment. RWJF believed there must be less costly ways to serve these youth that produced much better outcomes – approaches that prevented custody relinquishment and congregate care.

Ohio was one of the states to respond to RWJF and was awarded funding to pilot a program. This work happened through PEP in Cuyahoga County. In collaboration with the local mental health board, PEP created its signature program, PEP Connections. Since its inception, PEP Connections has been providing intensive care coordination using a high-fidelity wraparound approach, producing excellent outcomes for thousands of children and families and saving government systems millions of dollars.

PEP Connections Funding

For decades, this program was supported through a special 1915a Medicaid option. Behavioral Health Redesign threatened the survival of this program when the State made the decision to end 1915a without a replacement. Legislative leaders saw the value in this program, not only to the residents of Northeast Ohio, but as a model for what might be in other parts of the state. These leaders took action to preserve PEP Connections providing a one-year grant of \$2.5 million, with the hopes that the State would soon create a way that this program could be sustained and replicated.

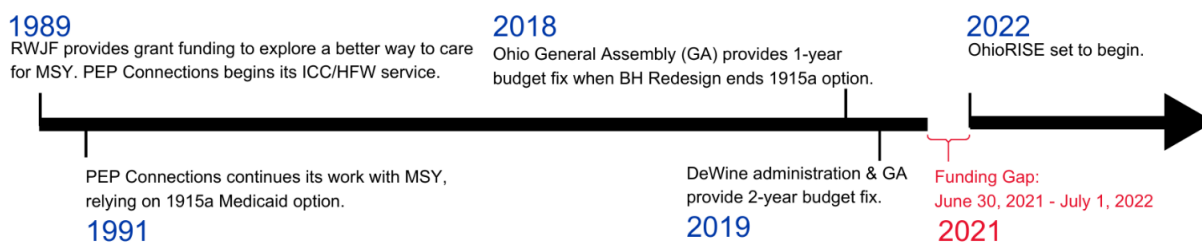
Then, in the last biennium budget, the DeWine administration and the General Assembly provided PEP Connections with an annual \$2.5 million grant, sustaining this program while the State works to create better systems to serve multi-system involved youth (MSY).

Bridge to Ohio Rise

Recently, the State unveiled its OhioRISE initiative, which provides great hope and promise for this work. We have great faith in this administration and its cabinet leaders to see this through, which is great news for Ohio's children and families.

PEP Connections provides direct value to Northeast Ohio, preventing hundreds of youth from going into congregate care and preserving families. It also serves as an essential model for the State as it develops its framework through OhioRISE, which has made central to its design the plans for an intensive care coordination model using a high-fidelity wraparound approach, a service that prevents unnecessary custody relinquishment. This service – intensive care coordination using a high-fidelity wraparound approach – is the very service PEP provides with expertise and has done for the past 30 years.

PEP Connections faces one essential, almost existential challenge, which is that our bridge funding ends on June 30, 2021 and the OhioRISE components that will support a program like PEP Connections are not set to commence until January 2022 at the earliest.



Final Mile Request

When RWJF provided the seed funding to pilot PEP Connections, it hoped that if this program proved its value that Ohio would set the policy and funding in place to make this service scalable across Ohio. PEP Connections delivered on its promise, demonstrating the desired positive outcomes for children and families while reducing financial and human costs dramatically. Yet, until now, Ohio had not created those hoped long-term solutions.

Today, though, is different. We are at a hopeful juncture where the administration and legislature are leading on these fronts, as evidenced by the creation of OhioRISE. It is decades since the program's inception, yet it is the closest we have come to a positive, productive long-term funding and policy solution that will be of benefit to children, families and systems across Ohio. We are so close to the finish line; however, PEP Connections will not be able to go that final mile without additional support for the last leg of this marathon — the unfunded period between the June 2021 to the launch of OhioRISE in 2022.

For these reasons, we ask that the General Assembly consider funding the final bridge needed to get PEP to the OhioRISE full implementation in FY 23. We are requesting \$2.5 million in this biennium budget, needed in FY 22, making this request half of what was provided in the last biennium budget. We are grateful that the House added \$1,000,000 to its budget version for this purpose, yet that still leaves a significant gap of \$1.500,000.

We are grateful for this administration's and legislature's support to children and the innovation and leadership it is bringing to these critical issues. We hope that you will choose to provide this final bridge funding so that PEP Connections can continue to produce positive outcomes for children and families and can serve as a model for what can be in other regions of our state.

Thank you. We look forward to continuing to work with you to build hopeful futures for all of Ohio's children.