

November 28, 2022

RE: Testimony in Support of HB 135

Dear Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health Committee, my name is Luke Russell, and I am the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio, often referred to as NAMI Ohio. On behalf of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio, I want to thank Representative Manchester and Representative West for their commitment and efforts to ensure individuals with serious mental illness have access to life-changing and life-saving medications.

We are proud that we are the largest mental health advocacy organization in the country representing over 500,000 Ohio citizens and their families whose lives have been invaded by mental illness. NAMI Ohio has 41 affiliates throughout Ohio representing all 88 counties. Each of you have constituents with mental illness and their families who have experienced the stigma of mental illness.

Patients with rare or chronic diseases, including mental illness, often require high-cost medications to maintain their health. Both HB 135 joint sponsors, Rep. Manchester and Rep. West, have been approached by members who were told that manufacturer copay assistance is just an incentivize for physicians to prescribe more expensive drugs. Beyond the fact that 99.6% of prescription assistance is delegated for medications which have no generic alternatives, this is not the case for many people with chronic conditions.

In the case of mental illness, many medications are not interchangeable, and treatment is based on the individual's needs. Mental health care providers determine the appropriate medications and consider other variables including other health conditions and possible drug interactions. Medication adherence is critically important for patients living with mental illness to maintain their treatment progress and prevent relapses. As insurance companies progressively shift the cost of medications to patients through increasing out-of-pocket maximums and plan design including deductibles, copays, coinsurance, tiered formularies and specialty pharmacies, etc., patients increasingly face roadblocks to access their medications.

Third-party copay assistance allows many individuals to access critical, life-saving medications. Often it is the only way they can afford the medications they need, even if they have insurance. High out-of-pocket costs cause people to non-adhere to their medications, causing even more of a burden to our healthcare system.

Thank you for your time and attention today, and I am open to any comments or questions you may have regarding this legislation. Feel free to contact me at Luke@namiohio.org or 614-224-2700.

Main: (614) 224 - 2700 | Fax: (614) 224 - 5400 | Helpline: (800) 686-2646
Email: namiohio@namiohio.org | Website: www.namiohio.org