



## **Senator Theresa Gavarone**

2<sup>nd</sup> Ohio Senate District

Sponsor Testimony for Senate Bill 364

Senate Health Committee

December 14, 2022

Chairman Huffman and Members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for affording me the chance to give sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 364.

This legislation would create a new licensed healthcare professional called a Certified Mental Health Assistant (CMHA). This program, which would be spearheaded by the Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED), offers prospective students a pathway to specialize in mental health. The CMHA is similar to a Physician Assistant (PA), but offers students the opportunity to specialize solely in mental health and substance abuse disorders.

Ohio is currently struggling with a mental health crisis that is only being exacerbated by a declining mental health workforce. According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, between 2016 and 2030, Ohio is projected to lose over 300 psychiatrists. This will leave the state with just 1,060 psychiatrists or 52% of the number needed. Quite simply, we are at a critical point where the demand for mental healthcare services vastly outpaces the current and projected workforce.

Senate Bill 364 is an innovative solution to a growing problem. CMHAs will need a Bachelor's degree to get into the program, followed by two years of intensive education and clinical training that wholly focuses on mental health and substance abuse disorders. This is comparable to a PA's education timeframe and training requirements.

CMHAs will work under the supervision of a physician, with whom they will meet weekly or more frequently, if needed, to discuss the care that they are providing. It is important

to note that CMHAs will have some limitations in the way they practice. For example, their prescribing authority will be limited and only physicians will be able to make a diagnosis.

CMHAs will act as an extension of a physician and will improve access for people seeking mental healthcare services across the state. This would be a first-of-its-kind program to address the ongoing mental health crisis.

Chairman Huffman, thank you again for allowing me to give sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 364 on the last day of the 134<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. I am hoping to get this vital conversation started so that we can hit the ground running as we begin the 135<sup>th</sup> General Assembly next month.

I am happy to answer any questions members of the committee may have at this time.