



**Interested Party Testimony on House Bill 354
House Finance Committee
December 12, 2023**

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the House Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on House Bill 354. My name is Thomas Stuber, I am the President and Chief Legislative Officer for The LCADA Way (based in Lorain and Cuyahoga counties), but today I come to you representing the Ohio Alliance of Recovery Providers (OARP) for which I serve as President.

OARP is a statewide organization made up of thirty-nine addiction treatment providers, certified by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, whose members work together as a system to help clients move from active addiction to productive citizenship. Our member organizations work to increase access to treatment and develop a recovery-oriented system of care for all Ohioans. Through our professional networking and idea sharing, we have created a collective knowledge of best practices for optimal care and share this information with state and national legislators.

The community behavioral health field has faced increased demand for services with increased staff turnover. This workforce crisis has been exacerbated by both the opioid epidemic (which has only intensified) and the COVID-19 pandemic. More than ever, Ohio needs a robust, reliable, and accessible behavioral health system, and I say that because we know what is coming having seen it before. After the casinos opened and again recently with legalized sports betting, our providers have seen an increased need for gambling addiction treatment. With the legalization of recreational marijuana, we need to be ready to treat those who desperately need and seek our help.

However, complicating our ability to recruit and retain qualified staff is a lack of adequate funding. Without adequate funding, we cannot treat the number of Ohioans coming to us for services. Many residential treatment providers are operating at 50%-75% capacity because they are unable to attract sufficient staff to expand care. More funding is needed so we may increase salaries for our employees and compete with market-wide wage growth.

I am here today to ask for your help, and the good news is that the voters of Ohio already approved it. **OARP respectfully requests that House Bill 354 be amended to reinstate Issue 2's dedicated 25% tax revenue funding for substance use and addiction treatment as well as behavioral health workforce retention and recruitment.** We believe this money should be funded with the oversight of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and it should be specifically dedicated for workforce and direct care services.

Additionally, we agree that many of Ohio's jails are having to provide substance use treatment services. In fact, some of OARP's providers are the organizations providing those services. With that in mind, **we would like to recommend that any dedicated funding in House Bill 354 for behavioral health services in jails have a requirement that the jails contract with licensed community behavioral health providers.** This can be done in conjunction with the local ADAMHS boards, but we want to make sure that the people providing services in jails are credentialed and qualified to actually offer those services.

Thank you for your time today and allowing me to speak on behalf of the Ohio Alliance of Recovery Providers. I just want to reiterate that an increase in funding to these vital services – especially from a dedicated funding source – will incentivize more workers to pursue careers in the community behavioral health system, retain and invest in the staff we currently have, and most importantly, it will allow providers to care for all those who need our services.

Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me.