



**Meredith Craig, Director of Healthcare Policy
Ohio Chamber of Commerce**

*Proponent Testimony – House Bill 97
June 20, 2023*

Chairman Cutrona, Vice Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the House Provider Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 97. My name is Meredith Craig, and I am the Director of Healthcare Policy for the Ohio Chamber of Commerce.

As you may know, the Ohio Chamber has served as the state’s leading business advocate, and we represent over 8,000 companies that do business in Ohio. Our mission is to aggressively champion free enterprise, economic competitiveness, and growth for the benefit of all Ohioans. As part of our mission, we seek to make Ohio the best place in the country for business to operate and grow.

One of the most consistent themes we hear from our member companies, across nearly every sector of healthcare, is difficulty finding workforce talent. We want to thank Representative Pavliga for her work on this important issue. As has been highlighted, Ohio is at a critical point. Current workforce shortages cannot keep pace with the demand for behavioral health services. Ohio is projected to have only 52% of the psychiatrists it needs by 2023.¹

In the Chamber’s recent publication, [Blueprint for Ohio’s Economic Future](#), we highlight the need to increase access to addiction treatment, harm reduction, and mental health services. In partnership with Accenture, our study demonstrates the importance of the business community supporting statewide campaigns to address the stigma of addiction, and evidence-based treatment and recovery services. This requires that all areas of the state have access to quality and effective behavioral health services. Ultimately, Ohio must address the shortage of personnel in behavioral health and recovery support services. Because workforce demand and access to behavioral health treatment is critical to our members, this legislation is one of our top policy priorities for the 135th General Assembly.

The Ohio Chamber supports the creation of a new licensed healthcare professional as prescribed in HB 97 – a certified mental health assistant (CMHA). This new CMHA will be a two-year master’s level training program and will provide training necessary for identifying and managing mental health and substance use disorders. This ultimately will increase patient access to affordable, high quality behavioral health care.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide support for HB 97. Investing in mental health and safety is critical to building solid workplaces, a strong workforce, and strong communities.

¹ Health Resource and Services Administration (HRSA), “State-Level Projections of Supply and Demand for Behavioral Health Occupations: 2016-2030,” September 2018. [State-Level Projections of Supply and Demand for Behavioral Health Occupations: 2016-2030 \(hrsa.gov\)](#)