



November 10, 2023

Chairman Al Cutrona
Health Provider Services Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
77 S. High St., Floor 13
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Dear Chairman Cutrona:

I am writing to express the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce's strong support for House Bill 97 (HB 97), which would create a new Certified Mental Health Assistant training program in Ohio. This legislation would address a critical workforce shortage in behavioral health medicine in our state and help achieve important outcomes for our business community.

The Buckeye State, including the Canton region, has benefited from efforts to attract investment and generate new jobs in recent years, holding the promise of rising prosperity for our communities. Unfortunately, we also experienced a decline in the number of available workers during the coronavirus pandemic, which has yet to fully rebound. As a result, the top concern regularly expressed by our 1,850 member companies across the Canton and Stark County region is finding and retaining workers to fill open positions.

Additionally, employers are increasingly focused on the effects of mental health challenges and addiction among their workers. Not only do these concerns create hiring headwinds, they also can result in lost productivity, absenteeism, eroded job satisfaction and increased workplace accidents.

Meanwhile, our state's capacity to provide mental health and addiction recovery treatment is severely strained due to a lack of qualified mental health professionals. Between 2016 and 2030, Ohio is projected to lose over 300 psychiatrists, leaving us with only half of the psychiatrists the state needs. While estimates suggest an increase in psychiatric nurse practitioners and physicians assistants by 2030, there will still not be enough of them to meet the needs for those disciplines, much less to fill the growing gap of psychiatrists.

By creating a training program for Certified Mental Health Assistants, Ohio can create a new pipeline to meet the burgeoning need for behavioral health professionals – and help address the ongoing twin crisis in mental health and addiction – while ensuring that employers across the state can attract and retain workers who have access to the support systems they need.

I urge your committee to act now to approve HB 97 and send it to the full House for consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis P. Saunier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "D".

Dennis P. Saunier
President & CEO