



**Interested Party Testimony- House HHS Subcommittee
HB 33- State Operating Budget
March 21, 2023**

Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston and members of the House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee – my name is Tonya Fulwider, and I am the Associate Director of Mental Health America of Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33 in support of a funding request that would appropriate \$150,000 in each fiscal year within the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' (OhioMHAS) Continuum of Care Services line to expand programming to reach more pregnant and parenting Ohioans experiencing the most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth, Perinatal Mental Health Complications.

1 in 5 pregnant and parenting individuals experience Perinatal Mental Health Complications (PMHCs), which are the ***most common complications of pregnancy and childbirth*** and are ***associated with higher rates of infant and maternal mortality*** (Note: perinatal refers to the ~2-year timeframe from conception to baby's first birthday). Many of us here today either have a family member, friend, colleague, or have ourselves experienced PMHCs.

Maternal Mental Health conditions affect mothers and birthing persons of ***all races, ages, and socio-economic levels***. ***Seventy-five percent*** of mothers and birthing persons who experience PMHCs remain ***untreated***: this increases risks of ***infant and maternal morbidity and mortality***, family fragmentation, lack of prenatal care, low social support, financial and housing instability, co-occurring health complications, unmanageable job strain, difficulty meeting maternal role expectations, and childhood or perinatal trauma, including interpersonal violence and sexual abuse. There are ***lifetime economic costs*** when pregnancy and postpartum depression and related disorders are left untreated equating to ***\$32,000 per mother-infant pair or an annual cost of \$14 billion nationally***.

Because of the significant negative impact of perinatal depression, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends that all women/birthing persons be screened for detection of perinatal depression during pregnancy and early postpartum. However, healthcare providers fail to ask 1 in 5 prenatal patients and 1 in 8 postpartum patients about depression, leaving many moms and birthing persons unscreened, maternal mental health complications undetected, and conditions untreated.

MHAOhio has been serving Ohioans living with mental illness for 66 years and is Ohio's leading source for maternal mental health access-to-care and support through the one-of-a-kind ***Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms (POEM) Program***. POEM was created by two other mothers, along with me, all of whom experienced perinatal depression and anxiety ourselves and

we couldn't find the help that we needed. We started POEM as a small nonprofit organization focused on helping moms get quality care and peer support, and our organization was acquired by MHAOhio in 2013. POEM is a proven program that connects and supports pregnant and parenting people with treatment and services, increases coping skills, decreases depression and anxiety symptoms, and improves health outcomes for mothers and their babies.

POEM is the only program of its kind, and one of the largest and longest-running peer-led maternal mental health programs in the U.S. Through proven and evidence-informed practices, POEM provides support to thousands of mothers & birthing persons in Central Ohio who may be referred by OB/GYNs, pediatricians, hospital systems and public health departments, and others. POEM serves as a single-entry point of care through the perinatal (pregnancy and postpartum) period.

Currently, POEM is primarily based in Franklin County and has shown positive outcomes that can be replicated across the state. In 2022, 80% of participants were verified to connect with treatment and/or service they deemed key to their recovery, an outcome unmatched in access-to-care programming nationally. All responding participants (100%) reported feeling emotionally supported, respected, and listened to by program staff; with 89% reporting increased ability to cope with daily problems and 77% indicating decreases in depression and anxiety symptoms. Given these positive outcomes and the tremendous need, there are requests to expand the POEM program to other communities in Ohio.

I urge your support for the amendment that would increase GRF in the OhioMHAS Continuum of Care Services line by \$150,000 each fiscal year for the Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms (POEM) Program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

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