



# RED OAK

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

**Megan Kleidon, President & CEO**  
**House Finance, Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education**  
**Testimony on HB 33 (SFY 2024-25 Operating Budget)**  
March 23, 2023

Chair Richardson, Ranking Member Isaacsohn, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 33 today. My name is Megan Kleidon, and I am the CEO of Red Oak Behavioral Health, located in Akron. Red Oak is one of the **largest providers of school-based behavioral health services in the state** and an active member of the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers. Offering a full continuum of care from mentoring, prevention and training to screening, intervention and treatment, our **staff of 162 professionals serves over 10,200 children and adults each year across four Northeast Ohio counties**. We pride ourselves on providing behavioral health services that “**meet you where you are**” – both clinically and physically – and our **integrated approach to service delivery** allows us to connect children and families to the resources and support they need **to build a better life and a brighter future**.

Governor Mike DeWine has set a bold vision for Ohio’s community mental health and substance use disorder system of care. His administration’s commitment to **fulfilling promises of the past by partnering with lawmakers to support high quality, accessible and effective behavioral health care across Ohio** is both laudable and vital for the future health and well-being of all Ohioans – and I am confident that the investments in community behavioral health within HB 33 will pay dividends far into the future. Now we need your commitment to invest in the health and economic wellbeing of Ohio’s children, families, and communities so they have the tools to succeed and ability to thrive.

**The mental health needs of our youth are the public health crisis of this generation.** The US Surgeon General’s [Advisory on Youth Mental Health](#) released in December 2021 noted that “The challenges today’s generation of young people face are **unprecedented and uniquely hard to navigate**. And the effects these challenges are having on their mental health is devastating.” The report goes on to say that, “Mental health challenges in children, adolescents, and young adults are real, and they are widespread. But most importantly, they are **treatable, and often preventable**.”

In the most recent [Youth Risk Behavior Survey \(YRBS\)](#) administered to Summit County adolescents in 2018, more than **one in three high school students (34.4%) reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, and 17.7% reported seriously considering suicide**. A recent national [study](#) found that between 2016 and 2020, the number of children diagnosed with anxiety grew by 29 percent and those with depression by 27 percent, and an astonishing **49.5% of adolescents will have a mental health disorder** at some point in their lives according to the [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#). Serious mental health problems are on the rise, and according to a 2019 report from SAMHSA, **60% of young people in need of support do not receive the treatment they need** due to stigma or lack of access to services. Of those who do get help, [nearly 66% do so only in school](#).

**CONNECT. GROW. THRIVE.**



School-based behavioral health services leverage existing partnerships between school and community behavioral health providers to maximize workforce, remove barriers to accessing care, and promote healthy school environments. Comprehensive school mental health supports that encompass social-emotional learning, mental wellness, behavioral health, resilience, and positive connections between students and adults are essential to **improving the physical and psychological safety of children and adolescents** and creating a school culture in which students feel safe and empowered. While schools are experts in providing academic training and education, **agencies like Red Oak are the experts in providing mental health, prevention, and intervention services for students.** Partnering schools with community agencies allows for the ability to leverage insurance billing when appropriate to **stretch resources**, provides a **sustainability plan**, and **removes any potential conflict of interest** by ensuring the mental health needs and progress of students are documented outside of the formal education system. Community mental health agencies are **licensed and credentialed** to provide this type of care, provide the **necessary supervision** to those who deliver services, can serve as **care coordinators** providing **linkage to additional community resources** for services such food, housing or other medical care, and are equipped to **ensure coverage in these roles during a potential leave of absence.**

Red Oak provides school-based behavioral health services today in more than **100 school buildings across 20 school districts.** We serve private schools and public schools, urban schools and rural schools, large districts and small ones, because mental health needs don't discriminate. Seven of our school district partners purchased health and wellness services from Red Oak using their Student Wellness and Success funding in FY22 - allowing for **5,296 students to receive mental health support that would have otherwise gone without.** Each of these districts has at least one Red Oak Health and Wellness Coordinator who uses **evidence-based screening** tools to help identify students in need of additional support, **meets with students who are at-risk** but don't meet the criterion for a mental health diagnosis both individually and in groups, builds capacity of the school's staff and administrators through **mental health trainings**, and help build skills and link students and families **to the resources** they need. These services are making a difference not just clinically (**97% of clients report improvement in their health** as a result of their Red Oak services), but also academically. Compared with their similarly matched peers, students who engage with Red Oak's services have **higher rates of attendance, higher rates of academic achievement** (including standardized test scores), and **lower rates of behavior incidents.**

I urge you to continue to support the investment of student wellness and success funds as part of the Fair School Funding formula in the Ohio Department of Education's budget and ask that you **maintain the important safeguards** included in HB 33 that **enhance collaboration with community behavioral health partners**, set guardrails that **prioritize using funds for physical and mental health services**, and **increase transparency on how these funds are used** to meet student, family, and community needs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today regarding the importance of these continued investments in behavioral health. I look forward to answering any questions you may have at this time.

**CONNECT. GROW. THRIVE.**