

Senate Finance Committee

Testimony of Terry L. Russell, Advocate
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio
May 25, 2023

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, and Ranking Member Sykes and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Terry Russell and I trust that this is my final appearance in this historic facility in which I have roamed the halls for over 50 years. I was blessed to work for those living with mental illness and their families as their spokesperson as Director of NAMI Ohio for 26 years.

Twenty-two years ago, I became a voice for adult care facilities and started the Ohio Adult Care Facilities Association. The reason for my interest is I participated in the development of the Mental Health Act of 1988. I immediately became aware that the promises in that document would not be fulfilled. We closed hospitals and allowed people to roam the countryside. Although I saw this over 20 years ago, society is now seeing it and begging for something to be done to fix our community mental health system.

When I look at each of you Senators, I understand that you have been inundated with financial requests. It's impossible to fund all of them. It is for this reason I came today. I'm asking you to prioritize the Governor's request to increase the Residential State Supplement funding for adult care facilities as the highest priority. These homes have not received an increase in over seven years. They house between five and sixteen residents who are severely and persistently mentally disabled. These residents living in over 800 homes throughout Ohio are in distressed neighborhoods because no one wants to live next door to them. The everyday responsibilities of these homeowners is to make sure that everyone is safe, fed, and monitored to ensure not only their safety but also the safety of the community.

During COVID, more people died in adult care facilities on a per capita basis than in nursing homes. The House increased the allocation to nursing homes by \$750 million and cut the adult care facilities by \$16 million. It just doesn't make sense.

People living with mental illness lose all of their supports and they end up in harm's way. These adult care facilities are safety nets. No one in the state has visited more adult care facilities than I have and I feel helpless when I think of these homes closing and their residents have absolutely no

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place to go but the streets. I have talked to many home operators who have said they cannot afford to continue providing care without this increase. Where will these people go? Homes are already closing at an alarming rate during the past two years because they cannot provide quality care at the current rate of reimbursement.

Again, you have had so many people ask you for money but I believe that it's the government's role to assist the citizens of this state who are the most vulnerable and in need. I coined the phrase, "You can't get better if you don't have a roof over your head, food in your belly and someone who knows your name." I ask each of you today to support the elements of this quote by approving the Governor's budget Line Item 336-510 for Residential State Supplement to \$24 million per year. This is an increase of \$8 million per year.

People don't ask to have mental illness. During my 50-year career, many legislators have called me to ask for help for one of their family members. Mental illness does not discriminate but the people living in these homes have lost all supports. I can remember one Senator calling me and saying that the psychiatric hospital was letting his son out on the street if he did not pick him up. He stated that he and his wife were scared and they did not know what to do. In this case, due to my persuasion, they did take their son back home. Thank God, he is now doing well. There are other families throughout Ohio that cannot provide the care needed and their loved one is lost. These group homes are the only hope for these families.

Thank you for your consideration.