

Edward Fields, ACF (Adult Care Facility) Home Operator

Ohio Adult Care Facilities Association Board Member

HB 33 336 510 Residential State Supplement

Governor DeWine's Budget made great strides in the funding of much needed mental health services. The amended House version of the Budget Bill for FY 24-23 (HB 33) is disappointing with the cuts to the Governor's proposed budget. One of the most disappointing cuts in HB 33 was the removal of the increase for the Residential State Supplement that supplements and provides housing for hundreds of Ohioans living with mental illnesses. We are pleading for the Senate to return to the Executive Budget's as-introduced allocation amounts for the 336 510 Residential State Supplement line at \$24,000,000 per year which equates to a proposed \$1,600 per month versus the current \$1,100 per month. The lack of housing is at crisis level and mental health group homes have not seen an increase in funding for over 7 years. We see an increase in demand for group homes as more and more homes close due to inadequate funding and the group home operators are faced with a heavier financial burden in today's economy.

I am an operator from Cuyahoga County who has provided care and service to the severely mentally ill for nearly 35 years. I own multiple Class Two facilities, and I understand what it takes to provide the best care and services to the population I serve. As has been already said, Ohio's residential facilities have not seen an increase in funding over 7 years, and taking the Governor's allocated amount from the budget has stunned those of us within the residential facility landscape. The question is how are we to continue at the current rate? The growth of mental health populations is rapid and changing at an alarming rate. The cost for the provision of care and services is continuing to rise; residents have become more demanding and in need of attentive care, and I believe that restoring the budget could make our small businesses attractive for collaboration with other Ohio funded institutions who align with us. More specifically the collaboration with penile institutions, where more than 70% of my residents come from a win-win. Restoring HB 33 the increase to \$1600 per month would mean for me sharing in the responsibility.

What this further means to me is utilizing mine and other residential facilities to share the burden of cost between incarcerating the mentally ill and housing them in the community where they could be better served. I have witnessed the low recidivism rate when residents are housed in the residential facility, and while jails offer discipline and control over individuals, they do not offer positive social structure for the mentally ill as compared to what residential facilities can offer. Our residents experience comfort, learn how to live among others, eat well, they are treated like humans.

Restoring RSS funding back to \$1600 is crucial for both me and my residents. With increased funding, we will be able to provide better and more efficient services, which will positively impact on the lives of our residents. It will enable us to improve the quality of housing and more specifically the care and services we provide. We offer a better way and a better standard of living. An increase in RSS funding will specifically benefit the quality of life for residents in the following ways: 1. We can contribute to the statistics and assist in identifying areas of improvement for the community and highlight what residents find important. This can help local government and agencies focus on what needs to be improved to enhance the quality of life for residents. 2. In residential facilities, residents can be empowered to feel heard and valued. While many have been thrown away by their families, operators are there to stand in the gap serving more than care givers, but as role models and mentors.

We strive to connect the would-be incarcerated resident to the community rather than jail. We offer a home-like atmosphere without bars. 4. Lastly, in the residential facility setting, community engagement is something we find important. Residents participate in Consumer Operated Services establishments, employment, higher education, and healthy outdoor activities. In conclusion, I urge Ohio's government to consider an increase in RSS funding to \$1600. This increase will enable our Severely Mentally Ill residents to experience better living environments, live meaningful lives, maintain their dignity, and afford them increased participation in a broader society. Overall, increasing the RSS funding can lead to happier, healthier, and more engaged residents which in turn, can lead to stronger communities all of which we represent. Why is it important for operators and our residents that RSS be increased? The answer, they too deserve the best we can give them. Thank you for letting me speak with you today, for I am honored.