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J.B. Buse,
LOTH Holdings, LLC

**Proponent Testimony for Amendment SC0243 - Additional Funding for Medicaid
Behavioral Health Provider Rate Increases**

Senate Finance Committee

May 25, 2023

Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee:

For too many years and for too many Ohioans, the addiction crisis has been an unrelenting plague, striking without regard for age, gender, race, income, or neighborhood. While we can be proud of the work done by the Hamilton County Addiction Response Coalition (HC-ARC), a national model for coalition building and deflection efforts, the devastating effects of this crisis remain, on families, entire communities, and a full range of public services. The addiction crisis has placed a tremendous emotional and financial toll on every city, town, and rural area in the State of Ohio. No part of Hamilton County has been immune.

I write to you today as the Executive Chair of the Hamilton County Addiction Response Coalition, representing a coalition of dedicated community behavioral health providers in our region. With the deadline for submitting SFY 24-25 budget amendment requests swiftly approaching, I implore you to act now and support Amendment SC0243, which calls for an additional \$134 million to be allocated towards Medicaid behavioral health provider rate increases.

The significance of this funding increase cannot be overstated. Coupled with the historic investment proposed by the Governor and the additional funds added by the House, this additional allocation of resources would result in a much-needed 20%

rate increase. Such an increase is crucial for covering inflationary and payroll costs, thereby ensuring the sustainability of a sufficient workforce in our community.

Ohio is witnessing an ever-increasing demand for mental health and substance use services across all age groups. Unfortunately, the scarcity of available providers poses a significant obstacle for individuals seeking care. The community behavioral health direct care workforce is a diverse group, encompassing professionals from various disciplines such as psychiatrists, nurses, counselors, social workers, case managers, residential staff, and peer supporters. They provide a wide range of prevention, treatment, crisis intervention, and recovery services for mental health conditions and substance use disorders.

By supporting Amendment SC0243, you will contribute to the stabilization and fortification of the behavioral health workforce, thus enabling our community to meet the growing demand for services. The requested \$143 million investment in Medicaid community behavioral health services rates aligns with the Governor's proposed 10% rate increase (\$220 million all funds) and the additional 3.5% increase (\$77 million all funds) added by the House (ODM Section 333.29 of Am. Sub. HB 33).

Moreover, it is crucial to acknowledge that our system requires a 20% increase in Medicaid rates to keep pace with inflationary costs and to effectively recruit and retain a sufficient workforce. The data overwhelmingly supports the necessity of this increase, and without it, the ability to provide quality care to Ohioans in need will be severely compromised. We urge you to consider the immediate and long-term implications of this funding request. The impacts extend far beyond dollars and cents – they touch the lives of countless individuals who rely on community behavioral health services to overcome their mental health challenges and substance use disorders.

Now is the time to demonstrate your unwavering commitment to the well-being of your constituents and invest in the future of our community. We implore you to lend your support to Amendment SC0243 by including it in your amendment priority list. We kindly request that you remind your fellow senators of the paramount importance of this request, urging them to prioritize it as well. We understand the magnitude of the decisions you face and the numerous competing priorities you must navigate. However, we firmly believe that by coming together and advocating for this

critical funding increase, we can make a substantial difference in the lives of Ohioans who are struggling with mental health and substance use disorders.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We look forward to your leadership and support in securing the necessary funding to strengthen our community's behavioral health workforce and ensure that every Ohioan can access the care they desperately need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Denise Driehaus". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Commissioner Denise Driehaus

Executive Chair, Hamilton County Addiction Response Coalition

Vice President, Hamilton County Board of County Commissioners