

**Senate Finance Committee – H.B. 33- Interested Party Testimony**

**Spencer Smith, Board Member Brain Injury Association of Ohio**

**May 25, 2023**

Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 33.

My name is Spencer Smith. I am a brain injury survivor, board member of the Brain Injury Association of Ohio, and the vice president of Smith Brain Connections. Brain Injury has become a hidden and undermanaged public health crisis in Ohio. In the State of Ohio, 1 in 4 adults has sustained at least one traumatic brain injury in their lifetime. That amounts to almost 2 million people in Ohio. Most likely, everyone in this room has known at least one individual that has suffered a concussion, a stroke, a drug overdose or a brain tumor that has resulted in a brain injury. And even if you don't know someone today, you could easily know someone tomorrow—your child could get injured at an athletic event, your parent could trip and fall, you could be involved in a car or bike accident. Brain injuries happen in an instant, and the impact is often long term.

I nearly died in a car accident in October of 2013. Doctors told my parents that I would survive but I would never be the same and may have to live the rest of my life in a nursing home. Nearly a decade later, I have earned a PhD at The Ohio State University and am teaching in the English department at Ohio University. I know this recovery would not be possible without the care I received at Dodd Hall at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center; I know the BIAOH's plan to provide TBI patients with information to help them in their recovery would help patients use similar resources to get back to their lives faster.

A difficult part of my recovery was having to advocate for myself with medical professionals who had never treated TBI before. My parents and I often felt like we had to teach doctors about how to treat my injuries. It would have been useful to be in community with other survivors or be able to talk to a resource who could have helped us with navigating my recovery once I left Dodd Hall. I know BIAOH's plan for expanding the helpline will help give direction to patients' recovery.

My story is not unique—every day the Brain Injury Association of Ohio speaks to TBI survivors and families that are trying to manage caregiving and find the resources they need. The stories are endless and often heartbreaking. The range of reasons for a brain injury are so vast: people being choked and deprived of oxygen, people being punched or knocked down, people fainting and hitting their head, drug overdoses, brain tumors, strokes, sports injuries or other unexpected accidents. Whatever the situation, it is never planned for. Help is needed—to fill a gap in services, give families hope, and help patients and caregivers connect with the care and resources they need.

Brain injury often results in long term chronic implications that affect an individual's ability to live independently, work, go to school and maintain relationships. While there are programs, services and therapies that can work to improve those outcomes for Ohioans, they are limited, difficult to find, and underfunded. Families tell us again and again that it is a complicated, frustrating and overwhelming maze trying to find help. I know how frustrating that maze can be. My family was desperate to find the correct resources for my recovery.

In the last biennium budget, Brain Injury Services received a small increase in funding to expand services. With this increase Brain Injury Association of Ohio was able to add three new programs including a monthly webinar series, a health and wellness program, and a transition program. The helpline capacity was also expanded by 100%, reaching more Ohioans than we had in years. Also with that increase, the Ohio Brain Injury Program added their brain injury connection program and expanded training opportunities for professionals across the state.

In the scope of brain injury funding, Pennsylvania currently has an investment of \$21.92 per resident, Kentucky has an investment of \$10.74 per resident, and West Virginia has an investment of \$1.27 per resident.

In the State of Ohio, our current investment in brain injury services is 5 cents per resident. If this bill is passed as written, it will raise our investment to 9 cents per resident of Ohio.

The lack of funding and resources not only impacts an individual's quality of life and ability to succeed after brain injury, it also affects our state's burden of care. When individuals do not have access to appropriate resources, support, and medical treatment, they often need to seek support from state-based assistance programs such as Medicaid waivers, unemployment, nursing home placement and more. According to the 2019 Biennial Report on the impact of traumatic brain injury on the people of Ohio, traumatic brain injuries that occurred in 2017 in Ohio will have lifetime costs of \$6 billion in medical expenses and lost wages.

There is a solution--and by increasing funding to brain injury services in this biennium budget--you are investing in that solution. We know from research studies such as the work done by Dr. Lance Trexler at Indiana University, that for those receiving community-based support services, 64% returned to work after brain injury, versus 40-50% who did not receive those same supports. The research done by Dr. John Corrigan at Ohio State University has shown that individuals living in states with better long-term services and supports had significantly more community involvement and achieved a higher quality of life.

The increased funding allocated to brain injury services requested in the biennium budget will be used to create a more robust community-based support structure for brain injury survivors that will allow us to support people in achieving better outcomes, gain higher levels of independence, and will ultimately save state dollars.

Chairman Dolan, thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts regarding House Bill 33. I appreciate your attention and will be happy to address any questions the committee may have.