



Ohio School-Based Health Alliance
Senate Finance Committee
House Bill 33- FY24-25 State Operating Budget
Interested Party Testimony
June 8, 2023

Good morning, Chair Dolan, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Senate Finance Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 33, the SFY 24-25 operating budget.

My name is Reem Aly, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio School-Based Health Alliance (“Ohio Alliance”). The Ohio Alliance is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit¹ organization. We serve as the only statewide organization created to improve access to comprehensive, integrated health services through school-based health care and we are committed to ensuring Ohio’s students are healthy and ready to learn.

I am here today, speaking on behalf of the Ohio Alliance and a diverse coalition of school-based healthcare partners across the state, respectfully urging your consideration to restore funding for Ohio’s school-based health centers. This funding was put forward by Governor DeWine, maintained by the Ohio House of Representatives, and has now been removed from the Ohio Senate sub-bill.

In some rural, Appalachian, and urban regions of Ohio that are underserved, school-based health centers are the only available healthcare provider for students and the broader community. To build on your incredible efforts to ensure the physical and mental health and well-being of Ohio’s children, we respectfully request you consider restoring the appropriation of \$15 million over the 2024 and 2025 State Fiscal Years to support and strengthen Ohio’s school-based health centers.

Need for school-based health centers

The sobering reality is that our children face increasing health and education challenges. Over the past few years, these challenges have only been exacerbated by the pandemic. Compared to just a few years ago, children in our state are reporting higher rates of anxiety and depression,² as well as higher rates of absenteeism from school.³ Even more concerning, we find that many Ohio children do not have access to the comprehensive and timely healthcare services they need to improve their

¹ The Ohio Alliance was relaunched in 2021 as a fiscally sponsored initiative of [Health Impact Ohio](#), a 501(c)(3) Regional Healthcare Improvement Collaborative based in Columbus, Ohio.

² More than one in eight children (13.1%) reported being depressed or having anxiety in 2020, up 42% percent from 2016 (9.3%). “Child Wellbeing Indicators & Data: Kids Count Data Center.” KIDS COUNT data center: A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2022.

<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data#OH/2/0/char/0>. Last accessed February 3, 2023.

³ Nearly one in three (30%) Ohio K-12 students were chronically absent in the 2021-2022 school year, up 25% from the year prior. “Chronic Absenteeism Trend.” *Ohio Department of Education Reports*. Available at <https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-state-attendance-rate-with-student-disagg>. Last accessed February 3, 2023.



health and reduce obstacles to academic achievement. **In fact, one in every five (21.6%) school-age children, ages 6-17, does not have a place to go or consult when they are sick.**⁴

School-based health center overview

School-based health centers are a leading, sustainable model for connecting kids to critical healthcare services, and improving both their health and education outcomes. These centers are created through a partnership between a school/school district and a healthcare provider to increase access to, at minimum, primary healthcare services to students. The healthcare provider serves as the operator and administrator of the school-based health center, working closely with the school or school district to meet student health needs.

School-based health centers have been serving communities in Ohio for several decades, and Ohio has led the nation in the establishment of comprehensive school-based health centers. In addition to providing access to primary healthcare services, these centers often also provide access to integrated behavioral, oral, and vision health services. While the primary focus of school-based health centers is to deliver health care to students, some centers also provide health care to: school personnel and faculty, families of students, and community members. In this capacity, our centers serve as a multi-generational approach to improving access to high quality, comprehensive health care.

Impact of school-based health centers

Health is an important factor that contributes to a child's success both inside and outside of school. Students who are sick or who have unaddressed health conditions often cannot focus inside the classroom and are more likely to miss school altogether. The consequences they face from interruptions in their education carry throughout their lifetime — including a greater risk for poor health as an adult, higher healthcare spending, and increased economic instability in their future.

School-based health centers bring health care to where our youngest Ohioans spend most of their time – school – placing children at the center of services and delivering care in a safe and nurturing environment. By investing in Ohio's school-based health centers, we can:

- **Keep kids healthy and in school so their education is not interrupted**
- **Reduce high costs to the healthcare system and Medicaid**, by decreasing emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and improving medication management;
- **Allow parents to stay at work so they are better able to support their families**, and prevent work productivity loss for employers⁵

Moving forward

Ohio is home to a growing network of school-based health centers that, in the face of rising health and education challenges, ensure students have access to healthcare services and families are supported in caring for their children. Reinstatement of the \$15 million allocated for school-based

⁴ National Survey on Children's Health, 2020-2021. Available at [NSCH Interactive Data Query \(2016 – present\) - Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health \(childhealthdata.org\)](https://www.childhealthdata.org/). Last accessed February 3, 2023.

⁵ Guo JJ, Wade TJ, Pan W, Keller KN. School-based health centers: cost-benefit analysis and impact on healthcare disparities. *Am J Public Health*. 2010 Sep;100(9):1617-23. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2009.185181. Epub 2010 Jul 15. PMID: 20634450; PMCID: PMC2920971.



health centers in the Ohio Department of Health's budget is imperative to maintaining and improving access to health care for our children.

We applaud our state policymakers' unwavering commitment to Ohio's children and families and urge you to act on our request to restore this funding. By strengthening Ohio's school-based health centers, together we can ensure that every child in Ohio is healthy, ready to learn, and set up for future success.

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