



Testimony Senate Finance Committee
Thursday, June 8th, 2023

Chairman Dolan, Ranking Member Sykes and Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

My name is Carrie Baker and I serve as President & CEO of Health Impact Ohio, a non-profit organization focused on the quality of, access to and equity of health and healthcare in Ohio. On behalf of the Health Impact Ohio (HIO) Board of Directors, Central Ohio Pathways HUB agencies' employed Community Health Workers (CHWs), and our staff, I'm here to respectfully ask for the restoration of the Center for Community Health Worker Excellence and its appropriation in Am. Sub. HB 33. This provision created a public-private partnership Board of Directors, including CHWs, and funding to enhance and highlight the CHW workforce in our state, which has grown exponentially over the last several years, and appropriated \$5 million each year of the biennium.

Community Health Workers are trusted individuals that are deployed in communities across the state to help individuals navigate complexities of their life situations, mitigate health and social risks, and help individuals meet goals and better outcomes. Approximately half of Ohio's over 1000 CHWs are working in a model called a Pathways Community HUB, or a nonprofit network of employers deploying CHWs in each Certified region. My organization operates the Central Ohio Pathways HUB, serving Franklin, all contiguous, Ross and Marion Counties. Through enacted law that originated in the Ohio Senate, and with your support of the Ohio Commission on Minority Health which has a large role in supporting the HUB model, where there were 5 HUBs in 2019 has become, there are now 12 HUBs across the state serving over 70 Ohio counties.

Once known in the legislature as a solution to impact minority infant mortality (and we certainly do!), CHWs in the HUB model or not are now in every facet of our health, health care, and human services systems-CHWs are working in hospitals, community-based organizations, behavioral health clinics, public health departments, federally qualified health centers, free clinics, and even schools. CHWs are finding medical homes for their clients or keeping clients in a suitable home by supporting connecting clients with rental and/or utility assistance resources, they are diverting from costly emergency room visits and diverting clients from jail. They were and still are a huge part of debunking myths in vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. CHWs ensure families have food, they are on the front lines of decreasing substance use disorders and getting clients help for mental health issues, and they are assisting clients in attaining consistent transportation, attaining work, filing taxes-all the while educating their clients about why these items are necessary, why diabetes A1C levels matter, the importance of medication adherence, how to prevent stroke for at risk individuals.

And for our pregnant population, CHWs continue to promote infant vitality. In our HUB, our CHWs work to ensure clients attend all prenatal appointments, have suitable housing, receive parenting education and any additional services: cribs, WIC enrollment, breastfeeding support and insurance enrollments. These CHWs are also serving other members of the pregnant client's household, ensuring the family support needed is there when the new baby arrives. In the Central Ohio Pathways HUB, our healthy-birthweight, post 37-week gestational age rate was 98% in 2022.

CHWs are making an impact because they are of, for and by the communities they serve, often bring their own lived experiences and knowledge of each community to the table with clients. The level of trust clients have with their CHWs often makes the difference in a client reaching a goal and attaining a better health outcome. CHWs meet clients where they are, without judgement or condemnation. They give clients hope for a better future, as



living examples of it. It is not uncommon for a client to receive services in a HUB in Ohio and go on to become a Certified CHW themselves, to give back to others struggling.

The growth of this workforce has exceeded current policy. While Ohio has several infrastructures to support CHWs, such as the wonderful Ohio Commission on Minority Health, the Board of Nursing, and the Ohio Department of Health, there are gaps we need to address collectively for CHWs to continue to thrive in Ohio, even outside of the HUB model. There has not been a CHW workforce study since 2018; employers struggle to hire new CHWs or bring on CHWs in practicum placements needed for Ohio Board of Nursing Certification. While there are 17 CHW certification programs approved by the Ohio Board of Nursing, CHW Supervisors lack a formalized Supervisor program and no one entity has been approved for CHW-specific continuing education requirements. Data for the collective deployment of CHWs to crisis situations in our state is a goal; Support for technology to accurately capture, articulate and gain reimbursement for the great work CHWs do, and its interoperability with other health and health care systems needs to be addressed. A Center, or "home" for all CHWs in Ohio will address these gaps and strengthen a workforce that has largely grown under-the-radar, quietly impacting the lives of thousands and thousands of Ohioans each year.

I'd like to thank all Ohio House of Representatives members, and especially our bi-partisan champions, Finance Chairman Jay Edwards (R, Nelsonville) and Representative Darnell Brewer (D, Cleveland), for including language creating the Center for Community Health Worker (CHW) Excellence in Am. Sub. HB 33.

This language is supported by HIO's Board of Directors, the Ohio Network of HUBs, the Ohio CHW Association, Ohio University/Alliance for Population Health, and so many others across the state.

This Center for CHW Excellence is an opportunity for the state to bring together state agencies, CHWs, and those of us in the private and nonprofit, community-based world to strengthen a home-grown Ohio asset: our community health workers. CHWs in our major cities, in our Appalachian regions and everywhere in between are worth this workforce investment. Please restore the Center for Community Health Worker Excellence.

Thank you for your time today, and I am happy to answer any questions.

Carrie Baker
President & CEO
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