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Support for HB 257

As Chair of the Board of Directors for the County of Summit Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board, I am writing in support HB 257 and the proposed authority for certain public bodies to hold virtual meetings.

Ohio's Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health (ADAMH) Boards are local government entities statutorily empowered to plan, develop, fund, administer, and evaluate the local system of mental health and addiction services. Ohio's 50 ADAMH Boards, covering all 88 counties, provide community members with access to a statutorily defined continuum of care, inclusive of prevention, treatment, and recovery supports in communities throughout the state.

Each ADAMH Board is guided by a governing board made up of volunteer community members appointed by county commissioners and the state. The Boards are statutorily empowered by Ohio Revised Code Chapter 340 to establish a unified system of services and supports for individuals with mental illness and addiction. Ohio's communities are unique, and local citizens understand the intricacies of their service districts. As a result, local citizen leaders are best positioned to assess local needs, determine local priorities, create local plans, and make local decisions.

The volunteers that serve as appointed members of ADAMH Boards come from a variety of backgrounds. They bring their personal and professional experiences along with their community connections to their Board roles and this all helps them guide the decision-making process for local Boards. These Ohioans serve in a volunteer capacity and dedicate considerable time to their Board role. Here in Summit County, we can have up to 14 volunteer board members and we currently have 13 seats occupied. Having served on this board for over 6 years and now serving as Board Chair and previous Governance Committee Chair, I know firsthand the importance of recruiting quality, engaged Board members. I also know that the ability to attend some meetings virtually would greatly enhance our recruiting and retention ability.

The option to attend meetings virtually would allow for increased flexibility to ensure that Board members are able to engage and participate fully in meetings using available technology. During

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the pandemic, when Boards were meeting virtually, several saw an increase in participation and attendance for board and committee meetings.

An additional consideration specific to ADAMH Boards is that there is a statutory requirement to have certain categorical appointments on the Board. ADAMH Boards are required to have an individual with lived experience with mental illness and an individual with lived experience with addiction serving as appointed Board members. ADAMH Boards are also required to have family members of individuals with mental illness and addiction serving on the Board. These voices and their lived experience are critical to ensuring that individuals and families utilizing the local system of care are driving decisions about the system of care. An option to participate in meetings virtually would allow for more consistent attendance and engagement when physical attendance may be challenging or while caring for a family member.

This bill will allow local ADAMH Boards to utilize available technology to conduct meetings effectively while the public remains able to access, understand, and appreciate the work of their local ADAMH Board.

Please consider this bill as an option to enhance support, advocacy and appropriate oversight for resources for some of Ohio's most vulnerable populations.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

In service,

Chrissy Myers
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