



**Interested Party Testimony- House HHS Subcommittee  
Amended Substitute HB 33- State Operating Budget  
May 10, 2023**

Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and members of the Senate Health Committee – my name is Tonya Fulwider, and I am the Associate Director of Mental Health America of Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Amended Substitute House Bill 33 in support of maintaining funding in the budget bill that appropriates \$150,000 in each fiscal year within the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' (OhioMHAS) Continuum of Care Services line to expand programming to reach more pregnant and parenting Ohioans experiencing the most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth, Perinatal Mental Health Complications.

***1 in 5 pregnant and parenting individuals experience Perinatal Mental Health Complications*** (PMHCs), which are the ***most common complications of pregnancy and childbirth*** and are ***associated with higher rates of infant and maternal mortality*** (Note: perinatal refers to the ~2-year timeframe from conception to baby's first birthday). Many of us here today either have a family member, friend, colleague, or have ourselves experienced PMHCs.

Maternal Mental Health conditions affect mothers and birthing persons of ***all races, ages, and socio-economic levels***. ***Seventy-five percent*** of mothers and birthing persons who experience PMHCs remain ***untreated***: this increases risks of ***infant and maternal morbidity and mortality***, family fragmentation, lack of prenatal care, low social support, financial and housing instability, co-occurring health complications, unmanageable job strain, difficulty meeting maternal role expectations, and childhood or perinatal trauma, including interpersonal violence and sexual abuse. There are ***lifetime economic costs*** when pregnancy and postpartum depression and related disorders are left untreated equating to ***\$32,000 per mother-infant pair or an annual cost of \$14 billion nationally***.

Because of the significant negative impact of perinatal depression, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) recommends that all women/birthing persons be screened for detection of perinatal depression during pregnancy and early postpartum. However, healthcare providers fail to ask 1 in 5 prenatal patients and 1 in 8 postpartum patients about depression, leaving many moms and birthing persons unscreened, maternal mental health complications undetected, and conditions untreated.

MHAOhio has been serving Ohioans living with mental illness for 66 years and is Ohio's leading source for maternal mental health access-to-care and support through the one-of-a-kind ***Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms (POEM) Program***. POEM was created by two other mothers, along with me, all of whom experienced perinatal depression and anxiety ourselves and

we couldn't find the help that we needed. We started POEM as a small nonprofit organization focused on helping moms get quality care and peer support, and our organization was acquired by MHAOhio in 2013. POEM is a proven program that connects and supports pregnant and parenting people with treatment and services, increases coping skills, decreases depression and anxiety symptoms, and improves health outcomes for mothers and their babies.

***POEM is the only program of its kind, and one of the largest and longest-running peer-led maternal mental health programs in the U.S.*** Through proven and evidence-informed practices, POEM provides support to thousands of mothers & birthing persons in Central Ohio who may be referred by OB/GYNs, pediatricians, hospital systems and public health departments, and others. POEM serves as a single-entry point of care through the perinatal (pregnancy and postpartum) period.

Currently, POEM is primarily based in Franklin County and has shown positive outcomes that can be replicated across the state. In 2022, 80% of participants were verified to connect with treatment and/or service they deemed key to their recovery, an outcome unmatched in access-to-care programming nationally. All responding participants (100%) reported feeling emotionally supported, respected, and listened to by program staff; with 89% reporting increased ability to cope with daily problems and 77% indicating decreases in depression and anxiety symptoms. Given these positive outcomes and the tremendous need, there are requests to expand the POEM program to other communities in Ohio. A letter of support signed by ten individuals and organizations endorsing the importance of this funding and program for pregnant and parenting Ohioans is provided as an addendum to my testimony.

I urge your support for maintaining the funding level in the budget bill of \$150,000 each fiscal year for the Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms (POEM) Program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

Tonya Fulwider  
Associate Director  
Mental Health America of Ohio

April 17, 2023

The Honorable Matt Dolan  
Ohio Senate  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

The Honorable Vernon Sykes  
Ohio Senate  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Dolan and Ranking Member Sykes:

We are writing to express our full support of an amendment that the House included in Substitute H.B. 33, the State Operating Budget, for \$150,000 in each fiscal year for Mental Health America of Ohio (GRF line item 336421, Continuum of Care Services) and respectfully request your support. The funding will support the expansion of Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms (POEM) Program to provide access-to-care and support to more pregnant and parenting Ohioans experiencing the most common complication of pregnancy and childbirth, Perinatal Mental Health Complications.

1 in 5 pregnant and parenting individuals experience Perinatal Mental Health Complications (PMHCs), which are the most common complications of pregnancy and childbirth and are linked to higher rates of infant and maternal mortality (Note: perinatal refers to the ~2-year timeframe from conception to baby's first birthday).

Maternal Mental Health affects mothers and mothers to be of all races, ages, and socio-economic levels. Seventy-five percent of mothers and birthing persons experience untreated PMHCs that result in higher rates of infant and maternal mortality, family fragmentation, lack of prenatal care, low social support, financial and housing instability, co-occurring health complications, unmanageable job strain, difficulty meeting maternal role expectations, and childhood or perinatal trauma, including domestic and sexual abuse. Additionally, there are lifetime economic costs when pregnancy and postpartum depression is left untreated.

Montgomery County falls high on the maternal vulnerability scale, meaning Dayton area mothers remain highly vulnerable to poor health outcomes. Additionally, mothers/birthing persons and families in Montgomery face several ongoing systemic health challenges:

- Montgomery County, overall infant mortality rate (IMR) in 2019 was 9.0 (per 1,000 live births) and Black IMR at 13.1. All Montgomery County IMRs remain higher than the Healthy People 2030 goal of 5.0 deaths per 1,000 live births or fewer
- The Montgomery County Community Health Needs Assessment of 2022 (CHNA) identified Mental Health Conditions (#2) and Maternal Health Concerns (#6) among the top seven most prevalent health conditions
- Similarly, the 2022 CHNA identified Mental Health Conditions (#4) and Maternal Health Concerns (#7) among the top seven most untreated health conditions

POEM is the only program of its kind, and one of the largest and longest-running peer-led maternal mental health programs in the U.S. Through proven and evidence-informed practices, POEM provides support to thousands of mothers & birthing persons in Central Ohio who may be referred by OB/GYNs, pediatricians, therapists, hospital systems and public health departments. POEM serves as a single-entry point of care through the perinatal (pregnancy and postpartum) period.

Given the significant gaps in perinatal mental health access in the greater Dayton region, we fully support expanding the Perinatal Outreach and Encouragement for Moms (POEM) Program to

Montgomery County. We recognize and acknowledge the effective services and positive outcomes that POEM has initiated in the greater Columbus region and welcome this as a viable solution to provide community-based access-to-care for moms/birthing persons and families in the greater Dayton region.

We respectfully request your support and maintaining the \$150,000 per fiscal year allocated to the POEM program in Sub H.B. 33.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to reach out with questions.

Sincerely,

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