



Ohio School-Based Health Alliance
Senate Health Committee
House Bill 33- FY24-25 State Operating Budget
Interested Party Testimony
May 10, 2023

Good morning, Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, and Members of the Senate Health 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 are committed to ensuring Ohio’s students are healthy and ready to learn.

The Ohio Alliance supports the proposed appropriation of \$15 million over the 2024 and 2025 State Fiscal Years for school-based health centers to ensure students have access to healthcare services. The Ohio Alliance also respectfully requests your consideration to increase the appropriation to \$20 million to better meet the growing needs of Ohio’s children and families, and to formalize the Ohio Alliance’s role in partnering with the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to strengthen Ohio’s school-based health center infrastructure.

School-based health center overview

Across Ohio, school-based health centers serve as a leading, sustainable model for advancing school-based health care and connecting children to critical healthcare services. 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.

We have school-based health centers that have been serving communities in Ohio for several decades, and Ohio has led the nation in the establishment of comprehensive school-based health centers. These centers provide access to primary healthcare services, and often also provide access to 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 health care. 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.

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.

Need for school-based health centers

We know that 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. When a child is not in school, their education is negatively impacted. 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.

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, with more children reporting anxiety and depression² as well as higher rates of absenteeism³, resulting in a worsening of outcomes and widening of disparities.

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 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

Impact of school-based health centers

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 removing barriers to accessing needed health care, school-based health centers achieve substantial efficiencies and cost savings including:

- **Reducing high costs to the healthcare system and Medicaid**, through reduced emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and improved medication management;
- **Keeping parents at work so they are better able to support their families**, and preventing work productivity loss for employers;
- **Keeping kids in school**, and providing the health services and supports they need to be ready to learn.⁵

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.

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.nsc.hhs.gov/interactive-data-query). 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.



Moving forward

The expansion and support of school-based health centers is necessary to ensure that, in the face of rising health and education challenges, students have access to healthcare services and families are supported in caring for their children. The \$15 million (GRF 440485) allocated for school-based health centers in the ODH budget will be incredibly impactful in improving access to care for our children within and beyond the 30 counties in which school-based health centers currently operate. However, the data I shared, and a survey of our partners indicates that the need for school-based health centers is much greater. By increasing the funding to \$20 million over the biennium, we can expand the reach of school-based health centers, serve more children at risk, and begin to turn the tide on the health, healthcare, and education challenges our students are experiencing.

The Ohio Alliance has a decades long history of working with school-based health centers to ensure their successful start-up, expansion, and sustainability. As an independent, nonprofit organization we are uniquely situated and committed to provide support to Ohio's school-based health centers. As such, the Ohio Alliance respectfully requests that our role and current partnerships working closely with ODH and ODE in supporting and strengthening Ohio's school-based health center infrastructure is formally codified. We are also happy to work in partnership with both ODH and ODE to assess how these funds can be most effectively and efficiently utilized.

We look forward to collaborating with each of you to ensure Ohio's children are healthy, ready to learn, and better able to thrive. On behalf of the Ohio Alliance and our school-based health care partners, we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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