

Ohio Senate Health Committee  
Representing the Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association  
Sheriff Michael E. Heldman  
Hancock County Sheriff's Office

May 10, 2023

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Antonia and members of the Senate Health Committee. I'm here on behalf of the Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association and the Sheriffs of Ohio to talk with you about the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services 2024 and 2025 biennial budget. It is critical that the funding level be returned to the level as introduced by Governor DeWine. It is important to know that without this funding county jails are at a much higher risk of liability with persons incarcerated in our jails that are suffering from mental health and addiction issues.

While under the direction of previous Director Tracy Plouck the Sheriffs in Ohio worked closely with her and her administration to have an open dialogue regarding inmates with mental health issues in our jails. To her credit she was the first Director that was willing to meet with the Sheriffs and Jail Administrators and willing to seek ways of lessening our issues. I am pleased to say that now Director Criss has followed the same path meeting with us, and has her staff available on a monthly basis to share updates and discuss issues.

Dealing with inmates with severe mental health issues in a county jail places everyone at risk of injury, constant verbal abuse, disruption of daily operations, as our jails were not designed to house inmates of this nature. Local hospitals will not take them, as many times they are brought to jail from the hospitals due to their behavior. Most of today's jails do not have a psychiatric doctor on staff, nor do they have psychiatric dorms or housing units that will handle inmates in crisis. The liability comes in when one of our officers is injured, the inmate is injured or dies. Jails in Ohio are facing these issues on a weekly, even daily basis, due to no beds available at the State Psychiatric Hospitals. If there is a chance of a bed for the inmate, he or she is returned to the jail in a matter of 3-4 days due to the pressure of other jails needing the bed. In most cases, the inmate is not stabilized in that time period and within a day or two of returning to jail, the inmate may start to show signs of aggression, along with spitting on corrections officers, throwing their feces, standing naked in their cell, which is when the jail will assign an officer to watch the

inmate on a 24 hour basis. The staff in our jails are being subjected to much more than what should be required of them.

As I have pointed out this goes on multiple times a day somewhere in Ohio's full service jails.

The Sheriff's in Ohio are asking for your help to provide the Ohio Mental Health and Addiction Services the funding that is needed as outlined in their budget. With a shortage in the workforce there will be a need for additional staffing to operate the additional beds that will be built to relieve the pressure that is being placed on multiple agencies and doctors, hospitals and mental health agencies in Ohio.

This is not the time to reverse our psychiatric care in Ohio. With all the issues of drugs coming across the border at an alarming rate, more and more people are finding themselves addicted and developing mental health issues. Inmates with heroin versus an inmate that is addicted to methamphetamine are quite different. A person with heroin will need medical attention and assistance with withdrawal. Whereas, a person that is addicted to methamphetamine can show acts of aggression, violence, show abnormal strength and can be delusionary.

In closing I am expressing to each of you the urgency of the funding issue that is in front of you. Please consider returning the budget back to the original request that was presented to the Ohio House of Representatives in Governor DeWine's original budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am happy to answer questions that you may have.