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Good afternoon Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio and the members of the Senate Health Committee,

My name is Daniel Bennett and I am the chair of the Summit County Suicide Prevention Coalition as well the Prevention Manager for Greenleaf Family Center in Akron. I am writing you today as a private citizen to urge the Senate to restore the funding for Suicide Prevention in the state budget to Governor DeWine's initial proposal of \$8,000,000 yearly for a total of \$16,000,000.

Suicide is a unique and complex issue that effects all Ohioans. We all have some inherent risk for suicide and suicide loss has a traumatic and lasting effect on our communities, our collective mental health, and on the economics of our state. We know that those who lose a loved one to suicide have a significant need for resources as well as an increased risk of suicide death themselves. Suicide tends to ripple out among our population and with each loss more people become vulnerable. From an economic standpoint, effective prevention efforts can reduce the strain on our clinical services, first responders, and ensure that those in crisis can get the help they need to return to their everyday lives. Investing in suicide prevention and mental health care reduces the number of days of missed work, school, and productivity. Worldwide, depression remains the leading cause of missed work as well as a significant risk factor for suicide loss. An investment in prevention will continue to reduce overall costs and save resources for our state while protecting our families.

Recently we have seen an increase in funding and awareness around our mental health as a nation which led in part to a national decrease in suicides for 2020. Unfortunately, many Americans continue to feel hopeless coming out of the pandemic and suicide rates are starting to climb again. Ohio recently saw a reduction in the number of deaths as well, but many of our marginalized populations have seen increases. In Summit County, our African American suicide totals have been increasing dramatically as well as losses in our immigrant and refugee populations. We saw these losses while our total number of suicides decreased.

Suicide is a public health issue and needs to be addressed from a public health approach. Funding is need to support coalition work, which can effect change on the community level while advocating for

the unique needs of a specific region. In addition to coalition work, suicide prevention funding will allow agencies to provide curriculum to students across Ohio. Many schools are struggling right now to support their student's mental health and in the coming school year HB123 the SAVE Student act takes effect requiring suicide prevention for all students grades 6-12 be presented to fidelity. Many schools don't have the resources or expertise to appropriately meet that mandate and rely on community agencies to bridge that gap. Suicide prevention training is also needed for the general public through access to gatekeeper trainings similar to how we make CPR available to reduce death from heart issues. Our Veteran population, Active Duty, Law Enforcement, Paramedics, and Firefighters have higher suicide rates than their peers in the general public. Each of these groups are exposed to trauma on a consistent basis. They serve our country, state, and communities tirelessly and are in need of mental health and suicide prevention interventions. Due to stigmas, many communities are unaware of the suicide risk around them. Funding is needed to continue to build awareness across Ohio so that our friends and neighbors understand their level of risk and what resources are available to them in times of crisis.

It is only through a collaborative approach that we can reduce suicide deaths in Ohio and nationwide. Our state needs the suicide prevention funding dollars restored to the proposed budget to help make that collaborative approach possible. We need to make lasting changes to policies, increase access to care, build out our successful coalition model, provide evidence-based training, and develop networks among our provider agencies. Working in suicide prevention for more than ten years, I have seen how this approach can save lives. I have also seen the devastation to communities and families when resources were unavailable, when funding is in short supply, or when guidelines around safe messaging are ignored. In our field, we strive for the concept of zero suicide, where not one life is lost this way. We can only work toward that goal if we have the people and resources in place to support Ohioans. Governor DeWine's initial proposal of \$16,000,000 would go a long way towards helping us meet that goal. Again, I urge that you restore the funding for suicide prevention.

Thank you for your time and consideration. If you have any questions or would like to discuss, I can be reached at 330-348-6093 or by email at mr.dbennett@yahoo.com.

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