



OHIO CITIZEN ADVOCATES
FOR ADDICTION RECOVERY

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May 10, 2023

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Antonio, members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Molly O'Neill, and I am the CEO of Ohio Citizen Advocates for Addiction Recovery (OCAAR) and a person in long term recovery, having celebrated 38 years of continuous recovery from substance use disorder this past February. I have worked in the prevention, treatment, and recovery services for 37 years.

OCAAR is Ohio's advocacy organization for people with substance use disorders. It is our mission to advocate for those in and seeking recovery from a substance use disorder to ensure political, social, educational, and economic equality. We work to accomplish this through education, mobilization, advocacy training, and listening to our constituents, so that we can lift their expert voices to be heard and considered everywhere decisions are being made about us.

In our work, at OCAAR we support a network of 10 Recovery Community Organizations across Ohio. A recovery community organization (RCO) is an independent, nonprofit organization led and governed by representatives of local communities of recovery. These organizations establish recovery-focused policy advocacy activities, carry out recovery-focused community education and outreach programs, and supply peer-based addiction recovery support services. Some of these organizations are also providing services to people with mental health disorders and those who are dually diagnosed with both.

Research shows that an individual's involvement in recovery support services through their 5th year of recovery results in an 85% reduction in risk of relapse.¹ Recovery support services like Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) and certified peer recovery supports provide significant assistance to communities across the state. The Addiction Policy Forum recently released a report that established Recovery Community Organizations as an important, evidence-based strategy to combatting the addiction epidemic, finding individuals who participate in RCOs showed improved health outcomes and sustained recovery. That individuals who engage in RCO services had low levels of substance use, of emergency room visits, and an increase in their recovery capital, things like employment, housing, education, and reductions in legal issues. It found that peer support services support treatment and health outcomes which reduce rates of relapse, increase treatment retention and satisfaction.¹



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Recovery support services protect Ohio's investment in ending the opioid epidemic through services like recovery housing, peer support, employment assistance, education, and connection to legal services yet are vastly underfunded. Most services cannot be billed to Medicaid and many small, community-based providers struggle to sustainable funding. Recovery supports are critical to ending the opioid epidemic. Currently the state of Ohio has only 10 RCOs. There is no long-term funding solution at the state level nor is there startup funding to get more Recovery Community Organizations in the state.

As Ohio looks at resource allocation and how best to serve our residents, recovery supports for people with substance use disorders must be strengthened and sustained. We respectfully ask for your support to create dedicated funding for Recovery Community Organizations across the state in the amount of \$11 million across the biennium to grow and strengthen recovery supports for Ohioans with substance use disorders. Recovery support services protect Ohio's investment and are transformative in fighting the opioid epidemic in Ohio.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Respectfully Submitted,

Molly O'Neill, CEO
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