



Ohio Senate Medicaid Committee
Am. Sub. H.B. 33 (SFY 24-25 State Operating Budget)
Thrive Peer Recovery Services
China Darrington, Director of Advocacy & Public Policy
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Chairman Romanchuk, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Ohio Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 33, the main state operating budget. My name is China Darrington and I'm the Director of Advocacy & Public Policy for Thrive Peer Recovery Services.

Thrive is a statewide community behavioral health organization made up of over 150+ employees, 85% who identify as consumers of behavioral health services living in sustained recovery and now working in a field dedicated to helping others achieve recovery through peer support. We do this in emergency departments and hospitals, courts and jail programs for our justice-involved persons and of course, in the community.

Today, more Ohioans of all ages need mental health and substance use services - and have tremendous difficulty accessing care due to long wait times directly tied to a lack of available providers. We provide recovery services for mental health conditions and substance use disorders. We're asking the Ohio Senate Medicaid committee to support the Governor's proposed budget for community behavioral health funding.

Thrive Peer Recovery Services wants to thank Governor DeWine for his leadership and vision for Ohio's community-based mental health and substance use disorder system of care – he is absolutely right in saying that “the system isn't broken, it just was never fully built.” His commitment to invest in the wellbeing of Ohio's citizens and communities so they have the ability to thrive and reach their full potential.

We respectfully ask the Ohio Senate to restore funding to the Governor's as-introduced levels in the following OhioMHAS line items so that our individuals, families, and communities have access to mental health and substance use services.

- **Line item 336-406 Prevention and Wellness:** Preventing these disorders from occurring or intervening early, at the mild and moderate levels is vital. Too often people with behavioral health disorder have to wait until their symptoms are severe before they are able to access the care they need.

- **Line Item 336-422 Criminal Justice Services:** Being able to access services that can help our justice-involved persons get the care needed to understand and intervene into their behavioral health disorders which can reduce recidivism.
- **Line item 336-421 Continuum of Care:** Restoring this funding allows our county behavioral health boards to continue funding the initiatives and providers that deliver these essential behavioral health services in our Ohio communities.

ORC Chapter 340:

Last year OhioMHAS convened the Chapter 340 Review Workgroup to update and modernize Chapter 340 of the Ohio Revised Code which addresses alcohol, addiction and mental health services. The final report has recently been published, and we ask that the Legislature keep any changes to ORC Chapter 340 out of the budget so there may be more public discussion for all interested parties.

Medicaid Community Behavioral Health Increases

Thrive is very appreciative of the investments into our behavioral health continuum of care. Particularly the \$30 million for Mental Health Peer Recovery Support. Thrive fully supports Governor DeWine and the Department of Medicaid for the substantial investments included in this budget: \$220 million (a 10% increase) over the biennium for behavioral health services. This couldn't be more timely. The demand for behavioral health services is up significantly since 2019. However, more funding is necessary, and we absolutely need your help at this time.

Without adequate funding, we cannot serve the number of Ohioans needing services. The 10% increase proposed by the Governor in HB 33 for behavioral health services is essential, but it will only cover the inflationary increases that providers have seen the last few years. More is needed so we may increase salaries for our employees and compete with market-wide wage growth.

Thrive respectfully requests your support to increase funding for Medicaid community behavioral health services (line item 651525) by an additional \$143 million (all funds) over the biennium. Additional funds will bring the total amount up to a 20% increase for these vital services and it will incentivize more workers to pursue careers in community behavioral health. It will allow us to retain and invest in current staff, and most importantly, it will allow Thrive, and other community behavioral health providers to provide care to all Ohioans who need our services.

Thrive supports the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' (OhioMHAS) budget as it was introduced, and we are very thankful for Director Lori Criss' leadership through the last few years. Like many behavioral health providers, Thrive struggles to hire enough peer supporters to meet the demand for services. We certainly aren't unique in this problem. Thrive has created an innovative workforce development program in Cuyahoga County and is working with OhioMHAS to create workforce development pathways such as paid-internships and apprenticeships, mentoring, and job readiness skills to attract more people into the behavioral health field, and we are grateful to you in the legislature for appropriating funds in HB 45 last year to help accomplish these goals.

Thrive Peer Recovery Services works to increase access to the services and support that will help Ohioans develop a recovery-oriented system of care for themselves. We want to do this all over the state of Ohio. The demand is certainly there, we ask for your help to meet this need. Thank you for your time today and allowing me to speak on behalf of Thrive Peer Recovery Services. I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me.