



**The Nord Center**  
*Transforming Lives. Together.*

**Don Schiffbauer, CEO**  
**Senate Medicaid Committee**  
**Testimony on HB 33 (SFY 2024-25 Operating Budget)**  
**March 11, 2023**

Chair Romanchuk, Vice Chair Wilson, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 33. My name is Don Schiffbauer and I am the chief executive officer of The Nord Center. The Nord Center is a nonprofit, community behavioral health center headquartered in Lorain, Ohio. We are the largest provider of behavioral health services in Lorain County. We also have a footprint in Huron County and our catchment area encompasses other communities adjacent to ours. It does not matter where you're from or your ability to pay; anyone can receive any of the services at our agency. The Nord Center has five core programs, adult behavioral health, child and adolescent behavioral health, crisis services, sexual assault services, including rape crisis for both adults and children and residential services.

For 75 years, it's been our mission to engage our community to support and promote mental health and well-being. As part of this mission, we serve some of the most vulnerable people in our community. Our behavioral healthcare workforce is diverse ranging from entry-level residential aid positions to highly credentialed roles such as psychiatrist. Jobs at the agency encompass a wide range of disciplines and educational levels. Our team provides behavioral health services not only within our brick and mortar, physical space, but also in people's homes and community settings. Over the last several years, we have made efforts to raise salaries across our organization. We have managed to do this without any increase in revenue, as the majority of our funding is billable Medicaid services.



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We are enthusiastic and hopeful about the emphasis Governor DeWine has placed on behavioral health and substance use disorder services. We applaud the prioritization of this critical healthcare need and we look forward to striving for, and ultimately achieving, parity with our colleagues in physical medicine. Following Governor DeWine's lead, our community, our schools, and our area businesses are making great strides in improving access to, and decreasing stigma associated with, behavioral health and substance use disorder.

Increasing access to behavioral health services and decreasing the long-standing stigma associated with these diseases certainly is a step in the right direction. However, it does come at a cost because continuing to meet the increasing demand for services requires an increasing workforce. The pandemic has changed the way employees see traditional employment. Labor market pressures, since the global pandemic, have measurably worsened workforce conditions in behavioral health. New employees challenge employers with demands for increased salary transparency, innovative work schedules and keeping the employees on a steady professional and compensatory development program that starts their first day of employment.

The Nord Center, along with our colleagues, struggle to compete with other healthcare sectors for the same workers. The struggle becomes glaringly evident as we look at the 2022 Ohio Council Compensation and Benefits report. Agencies have seen anywhere from a 16% to 20% increase in median salaries across all community behavioral health positions. Our counselors, therapists, nurse practitioners and other behavioral healthcare professionals are being lured away from community behavioral health agencies in search of more money, more flexible scheduling, tuition assistance and loan repayment programs. For the past three years our agency



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has provided a modest 2% increase in annual salaries. And we do our best to ensure that that 2% increase is not eaten up by increases to healthcare premiums.

We are grateful to Director Criss, Director Corcoran, and Governor DeWine for including a 10% across-the-board Medicaid reimbursement rate increase. And with \$0.92 of every dollar The Nord Center earns going directly into client care, we will continue to maximize the working power of every revenue dollar. But make no mistake, 10% is not enough. Which is why I am respectfully asking you to support an additional \$143 million investment in Medicaid community behavioral health services rates in order to stabilize and strengthen the behavioral health workforce. This additional Medicaid revenue will be a significant investment to support not only unrestricted access to behavioral healthcare and substance use disorder services for those who need them, but also a path to a more cost effective, high-quality, and high value healthcare delivery system. When organizations are able to deliver high-quality and high-value healthcare, patients, payers, and the community experience an overall net reduction in cost of care. Having access to routine behavioral healthcare and substance use disorder treatment decreases the need for high-cost emergency room visits that may convert into higher cost inpatient hospital stays. Access to care will also serve to decrease the utilization of municipal resources, such as law-enforcement and EMS personnel, by providing our community with an alternative to jail or incarceration that arise from behavioral health or substance use disorder crises. The additional dollars will aid in decreasing employee turnover, which in turn can reduce avoidable spending on repeated new employee orientation and onboarding. And lastly it will serve to keep good paying jobs within our community, even perhaps, helping to alleviate the outflow of higher-paying jobs.



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At The Nord Center, we take great pride in the healthcare that we deliver to over 312,000 residents of Lorain County and surrounding communities. We have been doing it for 75 years, and God willing, with this critical investment by this governing body, my hope is that we will be doing it for another 75 years. This investment will help to ensure the provision of high-quality and high value, behavioral healthcare and substance use disorder, treatment, not only by removing barriers to access care, and continuing to decrease stigma, but also by supporting our mission of engaging people in our community to achieve mental and emotional health through prevention, treatment, and advocacy.

Thank you for your time today and allowing me to speak. I am happy to answer any questions you may have for me.