

**Opponent Testimony - Ohio State Medical Association
Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee
SB 60 – Certified Mental Health Assistants
Presented by Monica Hueckel, VP, Advocacy**

May 31, 2023

On behalf of the Ohio State Medical Association (OSMA), the state's oldest and largest professional organization representing Ohio physicians, medical residents, and medical students, I thank Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram, and the members of the Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee for the opportunity to testify today regarding Senate Bill 60. My name is Monica Hueckel and I am the Vice President of Advocacy at OSMA. OSMA, along with others in the medical community, has numerous concerns about this legislation.

As you know, SB 60 would establish licensure by the State Medical Board for a new allied practitioner, certified mental health assistants (CMHAs). While we understand and share the common goal that drives the intent behind the bill - to help address increased need for mental health care services across the state – we do not believe that this proposal is the solution.

First, we are concerned by the lack of specificity in the bill dealing with education and training of these individuals. With the creation of a brand new allied practitioner comes a significant amount of detail needed to ensure proper education and training, so that we can be sure patients are properly protected. While we have heard previous testimony related to a masters level educational course and clinical training similar to other similar allied practitioners, none of that language is incorporated into the current version of SB 60. With other allied practitioners, since they have been around for decades, they have national organizations and credentialing bodies that ensure education and training are sufficient and are similar across all programs. Since this is a new allied practitioner, a national organization or credentialing body does not currently exist, leaving the specifics in this legislation to be only details surrounding the program, clinical training and scope of practice. We do not believe the current language in the bill will fully prepare a CMHA for the scope of practice that this legislation would authorize, nor does it ensure all individuals are educated and trained in the same manner. This is a huge concern.

Second, we are troubled by the bill's creation of another allied practitioner in Ohio with prescriptive authority, particularly with the ability to prescribe controlled substances. Additionally, the bill contains vague, confusing language and an overall lack of information and context about key concepts surrounding the CMHA and the CMHA's scope of practice. It is troubling that SB 60 leaves us with many unanswered questions while seeking to create an entirely new practitioner not licensed in any other state, especially given that this practitioner would be responsible for something as important and sensitive as delivering mental health care services to people in our communities.

OSMA believes that instead of creating the CMHA, Ohioans would be better served by actions that will strengthen and grow Ohio's existing mental health workforce. Ohio currently licenses physicians, Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, Physician Assistants, Psychologists, Therapists, Counselors and numerous other behavioral health specialists who are committed to solving our mental health crisis.

These are existing methods and resources in place for Ohio to take advantage of to better address the growing need for mental health care in our state, which are currently underfunded and underutilized despite having the potential for broad, meaningful impact. We would encourage supporting these resources and programs, rather than taking action in uncharted territory as SB 60 proposes.

Once again, OSMA is thankful to members of the committee for your attention to our comments and concerns about this legislation, and appreciates the opportunity to be a meaningful contributor to the legislative process. Please feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions.