



**Laura Padgett, State Program & Policy Director  
Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition**

Testimony on House Bill 96 – State Operating Budget (FYs 2026-2027)  
House Children & Family Services Committee  
February 26, 2025

Chair White, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 96, the state operating budget bill for state fiscal years 2026-2027.

I am testifying today on behalf of the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition (MHAC). The MHAC is a membership organization with more than 130 members statewide, including mental health and substance use disorder providers, ADAMH boards, schools, hospitals, courts, food and housing programs, managed care organizations, clubhouse programs, faith-based organizations, and others. We are uniquely positioned with a diverse membership base encompassing a broad perspective at the state and local levels on behavioral health issues facing Ohioans today.

The MHAC is also a member of the Coalition for Healthy Communities (CHC) and supports the unified advocacy agenda that the CHC has developed.

The General Assembly and the Governor have emphasized the need for Ohioans to have access to high-quality, coordinated behavioral health services over the last several years. Thank you for your support for funding services and programs to support the continuum of care for individuals with mental health and substance use disorders across our state.

House Bill 96 continues to invest in behavioral health priorities that support Ohioans, our communities, and the state's economy. As the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services proposes changing its name to the Department of Behavioral Health and shifting many of its funding streams into block grants, we support the Department's goal of addressing segregated funding streams that create barriers to services. We look forward to learning more about how the block grants will be administered and allocated to enhance services and access to care at the local level.

### **Behavioral Health Workforce**

Ohio ranks 25<sup>th</sup> in the nation for mental health workforce availability with a ratio of 330 individuals needing care to 1 mental health care provider (*Mental Health America, 2024*). Of Ohio's 88 counties, 75 (85%) are designated Mental Health Professional Shortage areas, with less than 30,000 to 1 provider ratio.<sup>1</sup> Bolstering the behavioral health workforce is essential to healthy, working Ohioans and a thriving state economy. The MHAC supports bold investments necessary to build the behavioral health workforce Ohioans need. We support investments in recruitment strategies such as working upstream with our high schools and vocational programs to provide our youth with behavioral health career pathway exploration through experiential learning, and address stigmas. We also support investments that support adult learners with scholarships, paid internships, and expanded career pathways including additional entry-level credentials with clear pathways for career advancement. We also support investments that focus on retention initiatives

---

<sup>1</sup> "For mental health, the population to provider ratio must be at least 30,000 to 1 (20,000 to 1 if there are unusually high needs in the community)." <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/mental-health-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&sortModel=%7B%22colld%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

that offer employees manageable workloads at professional wages commensurate with their education.

### **Reimbursement Rates**

The MHAC is grateful that the as-introduced budget bill sustains Medicaid provider rate increases from House Bill 33 in the previous General Assembly. While this increase has helped Ohio gain some ground in increased wages for behavioral health workers, if we do not increase the investment, we risk losing additional ground for individuals needing care and the workforce needed to serve them. We join with others in the behavioral health community in requesting an amendment providing a 5% increase to Medicaid reimbursement rates over the biennium to help continue to advance sustainable improvements in the workforce and the necessary supports and services to ensure healthy, working adults and families.

### **Crisis Services**

We have heard testimony stating that this budget will close the gap in crisis care and ensure that all Ohioans have access to crisis services. The MHAC applauds the investments in crisis services and requests that the state fulfill its promises to fund the crisis centers that have been built across the state and the services the centers provide. We are also encouraged to see funding to sustain the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The MHAC further requests that the General Assembly protect the adult-use cannabis tax dollars, maintaining the commitment to allocate 25% of the funds for substance use and addiction services.

### **Ohio's Aging Population**

As Director McElroy from the Department of Aging discussed in her testimony before this committee, Ohio is a rapidly aging state, with one in six of our residents aged 65 and over and the 6<sup>th</sup> highest aging population in the nation. People over the age of 65 are at high risk of depression, anxiety, and suicide. The MHAC encourages additional collaboration between the Departments of Aging and Mental Health & Addiction Services/Behavioral Health to ensure access to care for our aging population.

The Department of Aging covers several holistic programs for our older adults, such as PASSPORT, PACE, home and community-based services, as well as administering Healthy Aging Grants. The MHAC supports continued emphasis on the holistic nature of these programs and ensuring that the programs include behavioral health supports.

We would also recommend expanding the Older Adult Behavioral Health and Wellness Initiative under the Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services/Behavioral Health to additional sites statewide to increase access, particularly in underserved areas of the state. The goal of empowering our aging adults with the tools needed to sustain healthy lives is an investment in the health of our state and our families.

Madam Chair, members of the committee, thank you for your time today and your service to Ohio's citizens through your work here. The MHAC looks forward to engaging with you and the General Assembly throughout the budget process to advance funding and policies that will best serve the individuals in need of services and supports. Bolstering the behavioral health of Ohio's citizens is an investment in healthy communities, a strong economy, and a solid foundation for Ohio's future.

---

*The Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition (MHAC) fosters education and awareness of mental health and addiction issues while advocating for public policies and strategies that support effective, well-funded services, systems, and supports for those in need, resulting in stronger Ohio communities.*

*For more information, please visit <https://mhaadvocacy.org>.*