

Testimony of Riveon: **INTRODUCING PRIMARY CARE TO TREAT THE WHOLE PERSON**

House Children and Human Services Committee

February 26, 2025

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 96, the State Operating Budget. My name is Don Schiffbauer and I am the CEO of Riveon Mental Health and Recovery.

The Nord Center and The LCADA Way, located in Lorain County, merged on July 1, 2024 to become a new organization known as **Riveon Mental Health and Recovery**. The unified agency is a non-profit, community behavioral health center located in Lorain County, serving approximately 10,000 individuals annually. Riveon seeks to offer a comprehensive approach to healthcare by *integrating physical medicine* with our current mental, behavioral, and substance use services all in one location.

Two years ago, we stood up our Behavioral Health Urgent Care model, which allows for an urgent care setting for anyone with behavioral health needs. This model has been tremendously successful since the opening of the Behavioral Health Urgent Care in December of 2022. As part of the clients' visit, a nursing assessment is incorporated for every person, which provides a baseline for referral to primary care, when clients indicate they do not have a PCP. Since opening, we have had 1,893 total encounters, with 1,391 unique clients coming through the doors. This model has also lessened the burden at local emergency rooms due to the immediate access provided by our BHUC setting.

What we have learned from caring for our thousands of clients is that patients suffering from severe mental disorders have a reduced life expectancy of up to 10-25 years, compared to the general population. We believe that integrating primary care with behavioral healthcare is crucial for achieving better health outcomes, increasing life expectancy, and reducing the overall cost of care. An integrated care delivery model that is seamless and trauma-informed leverages the trust clients have with their behavioral health providers, ensuring they receive comprehensive care that they might otherwise lack or avoid. Riveon Mental Health and Recovery is dedicated to eliminating barriers to care, enabling clients to access services that support them, their families, and their journey towards healing, recovery, and healthy living. This holistic approach not only addresses physical and mental health needs but also fosters a supportive environment for long-term well-being.

In Lorain County, we know that there is a lack of primary care delivery to our citizens. From the most recent Lorain County Community Health Assessment conducted in 2019 by Lorain County Public Health Department, 42% of adults went outside of Lorain County for primary care services. Additionally, in 2023 the patient to PCP ratio in Lorain County was 1,800:1. *PCPs are seeing an average of 1,881 patients per year – which is an increase of 1.4% from 2022 (1,855 patients).* In Lorain County, Lorain and Elyria cities show the **highest** unmet need scores, demonstrating the need for additional services: **(0-100 / 100 being highest)**

- Lorain (44055) 84.39
- Lorain (44052) 83.11
- Elyria (44035) 73.02

As such, we are seeking funding to integrate primary care into our behavioral health care setting. We are seeking \$500,000 in each fiscal year for this purpose. We believe that the savings to the overall healthcare delivery system will be significant as a result of this integration. By housing behavioral health and primary care delivery all in one location, our goal is to simplify the path to recovery. We are committed to being always here, always ready, while providing a compassionate and inclusive environment where individuals of all ages can find the support they need to reclaim their lives.

Thank you for your time today. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.