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Ohio Peer Recovery Organizations (OhioPRO)
House Children and Human Services Committee
Testimony on HB 96 (SFY 2026-27 Operating Budget)
February 25th, 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 offer testimony on House Bill 96, Governor DeWine's executive budget proposal for state fiscal years 2026-2027.

I am Michael J. Krause, Executive Director of Ohio Peer Recovery Organizations (OhioPRO). OhioPRO is a statewide advocacy association for Ohio's peer run organizations and, more generally, peer and recovery support services. OhioPRO's member organizations are Ohio's certified peer run organizations – those organizations governed by a voice of lived experience who provide community-based peer recovery supports services to individuals with a lived experience of mental health, substance use disorder, or co-occurring disorder by individuals also with a lived experience. As a person with a direct lived experience who is in recovery from the same, I personally know the value of peer recovery supports. I can confidently share that without the support of others to help guide me on my personal recovery journey, I would not be standing before you today. The power of sharing one's lived experience is undeniable. Peer support works, and I am living proof.

Peer recovery supporters are an integral part of Ohio's behavioral health workforce. Rooted in informal traditions of mutual aid and shared experience, **peer support** has evolved into formalized, evidence-based services that effectively address behavioral health challenges. Peer recovery support services are often delivered, although not exclusively, through Ohio's peer run organizations (PROs),* dedicated to providing peer and other recovery supports in recovery-oriented, community-based settings. Other clinical and social service settings and systems also offer PRSS. PRS have been embedded in diverse settings such as inpatient and outpatient clinical treatment services, hospitals, emergency rooms, crisis services (including 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline call centers), peer respites, warmlines, reentry and parole, carceral settings, harm reduction services, schools, shelters, and even libraries.

Peers have become integral to Ohio's behavioral health landscape, offering significant benefits to people seeking care, service providers, and systems. Despite this progress, gaps and barriers persist around the sustainability and accessibility of peer services. **Long-term investment in**

PROs and the peer workforce is vital to establishing best practices, ensuring equitable access, identifying resource gaps and barriers in communities, and connecting individuals to a full continuum of support for recovery and well-being. With a commitment to invest in the peer workforce, Ohio will lead the way in creating communities where individuals and families can recover and thrive.

In addition to the benefits described above, growing the peer workforce and investing in PROs directly benefits various systems by:

- Reducing inpatient visits and crises
- Increase overall treatment capacity
- Improve treatment outcomes
- Increase engagement in treatment

The benefits also result in cost-savings for various systems and organizations.

OhioPRO thanks Governor DeWine for his leadership and commitment to Ohio's community behavioral health system. Throughout his tenure, Governor DeWine's commitment to build out a behavioral health system that was never fully built resonates loudly with the recovery community. The Governor understands the importance of giving a voice to the voiceless. By valuing what is shared by individuals like me who have received behavioral health services, Ohio's behavioral health system of care is better equipped to meet the behavioral health care needs of all Ohioans.

As we are appreciative of the commitment of the Governor, we are also grateful to the members of this committee and the entire Ohio General Assembly for your efforts in recent years to strengthen and expand access to behavioral health recovery support services for Ohioans in need.

The important policy initiatives and key funding investments included in HB 96 that sustain Medicaid rate increases for behavioral health services; support expanded crisis services and integrated care; pursue data sharing and technological innovation; and enhance prevention and school-based services are critical drivers for the economic vitality of Ohio. Attracting new businesses to ensure Ohio's economic vitality requires it have a workforce able to meet the need.

Investing in mental health and substance use care is sound public policy and wise economic strategy. Every \$1 spent on improved access to behavioral health treatment leads to a \$4 return on investment in improved health and productivity. Upstream investments in prevention and early intervention yield even greater returns, as every \$602 invested in these efforts to support youth results in an average \$7,754 cost savings, per person by the time they reach age 23. Expanded access to care grows workforce participation by up to 42%, which would in turn, increase U.S. economic outputs by \$53 billion each year – creating a positive feedback loop that both fuels economic growth and reduces public spending on governmental assistance programs



OhioPRO would like to address those policy initiatives and investments that are most impactful of its work.

Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

OhioPRO applauds the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) for its efforts to develop, strengthen, and enhance the community behavioral health system of care, and we generally support the direction the department is moving toward in HB 96.

OhioPRO strongly supports the continued investment in the creation of peer run organizations. While the aggregate funding amount is a decrease from the funding authorized by the General Assembly in the last biennium, the funding demonstrates its continued commitment to support the recovery journey of Ohioans. It is our long-term goal to see that in every county, and in every community across the state, Ohioans have access to peer recovery support services and peer run organizations who provide those individuals community-based safe spaces to recover.

In addition, OhioPRO supports the community behavioral health centers (CCBHC) whole-person, integrated model of care in Ohio; expansion of 988 and the crisis infrastructure with mobile response and stabilization services (MRSS) for youth and adult mobile crisis; and investment in universal prevention and early intervention. Likewise, we are supportive of OhioMHAS' efforts to expand access to medications in jail settings; strengthen community forensic services; promote high-quality specialty dockets in partnership with the Ohio Supreme Court; and ease access to the state hospital system for civil patients.

OhioMHAS has proposed to create six (6) block grants so that communities can benefit from more flexibility in the administration of those block grant dollars. While our peer run organizations work closely with, and are generally supported by, local Boards, we are awaiting additional details to ensure that investments in peer recovery supports and peer run organizations are protected and that there is accountability in the administration and distribution of those funds.

Lastly, we support the prioritization given to investing in the behavioral health workforce across the entire continuum. Investing in the behavioral health workforce is enhanced by creating career pathways for peers. As such, we support the creation of an entry-level mental health credential, based on the existing SUD entry-level credentials. This mental health entry level credential is complementary to existing behavioral health professional licensure and fills a gap by creating both non-degree and degree entry level career opportunities. It creates a much-needed career pathway for the mental health peer recovery supporter.

Recreational Marijuana Tax Revenue Distribution

OhioPRO strongly urges the committee to restore the distribution amount of the recreational marijuana tax revenue to the original level as passed by the voters. HB 96 would alter the distribution methodology from the state ballot initiative that passed last year, namely it would reduce from twenty-five percent to just fourteen percent the amount of revenue directed to the



Department. OhioPRO supports the Department receiving 25% of the revenue and that it be utilized for its 988 crisis operations.

Ohio Chemical Dependency Professionals Board

OhioPRO supports the transition of the peer recovery supporter certification credential from OhioMHAS to the Ohio Chemical Dependency Professionals Board (OCDPB). This transition has been coordinated by OhioMHAS and recognizes the value of peer support in engaging and sustaining recovery and elevates the professionalism of these essential workers. PRS want to be recognized as professionals for the integral services they provide. Furthermore, having a Board with the infrastructure necessary to enforce its code of ethics is necessary to preserve the integrity of the space. OCDPB has established infrastructure and experience in managing and administering multiple certifications, licenses, and endorsements.

As this Board has expanded in scope over time, regulating prevention, gambling, and now, substance use and mental health peer providers, a name change of the Board is now absolutely required.

Again, speaking from personal experience, people with a lived experience of substance use disorder or mental health disorder are incredibly resilient. Not only must we overcome our substance use disorders or mental health disorders, but we must contend with the unrelenting stigma associated with the same. I think most everyone would agree that stigma is real. In fact, the State has made significant investment to combat stigma and those investments are much appreciated.

This committee heard Director Cornyn of OhioMHAS testify before you that the proposed name change of her own Department was supported because it is less stigmatizing and more inclusive. Yet, the name of the Chemical Dependency Board is both stigmatizing and not at all inclusive, especially of the mental health peer recovery supporter. During this time of transition of the peer certification to OCDPB, while simultaneously proposing to change the name of OhioMHAS, it is only prudent to change the name of the chemical dependency board to one that is more inclusive and less stigmatizing.

Changing its name to the Ohio Behavioral Health Professionals Board would be a more modern and satisfactory name change to those peer supporters with whom I've spoken. I can't offer commentary on whether the name change would be accepted across disciplines. Since OhioMHAS coordinated its own name change by surveying over 300 stakeholders, according to the testimony of Director Cornyn, perhaps it is in the best position to undertake a similar endeavor through its PRS certification transition team. We must do better than "chemical dependency".

Mental Health Credential

As discussed above, the OCDPB would be a logical regulatory structure to support the entry-level mental health credential as it is designed in a manner consistent with the CDCA and LCDC



II. In a recent survey, nearly 500 Ohio peer recovery supporter stakeholders reported limited career advancement opportunities for PRS. The creation of this credential supports workforce development and provides a career pathway for peer, among others.

Conclusion

Investing in mental health and substance use recovery supports is sound public policy and wise economic strategy.

OhioPRO looks forward to working with the DeWine Administration and lawmakers during this budget process to advance sound policies, and direct resources to support community behavioral health providers, and most importantly help Ohioans seeking mental health and substance use disorder services to find and sustain recovery. These investments help ensure Ohio has a healthy, productive workforce that can continue to attract businesses and great jobs that grow our economy so every child can reach their full potential, and families can flourish as they strive to reach their dreams.

Thank you for your time and consideration today. I am happy to answer any questions.

For additional information about Peer Recovery Support and Peer Run Organizations, please see below.

[OhioPRO Investing in Peer Support Data.pdf](#)

[OhioPRO Valuing the Power of Peers.pdf](#)

[OhioPRO Funding and Sustaining the Integral Role of Peer Recovery Supporter.pdf](#)

