



**Ohio House Children and Human Services Committee
HB 96**

Testimony of:
Scott Sylak

Executive Director, Mental Health & Recovery Services Board of Lucas County
President, Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities
February 26, 2025

Chairwoman White, Vice-Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the House Children and Human Services Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify today. I am Scott Sylak. I am the Executive Director of the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board of Lucas County, and I also serve as the President of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities.

The Association represents all 50 Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Boards in Ohio. All 50 Boards across the state want improved access, quality services and enhanced outcomes for all individuals that receive services. With increasing mental health needs for adults and youth, concerning suicide death rates, persistent overdose death rates, limited hospital access for acutely mentally ill persons, the proposed investments included in this budget are steps in the right direction.

ADAMH Boards in Ohio are your local government partners tasked with establishing a high-quality, cost effective continuum of care for each service district. As such, one of our most important responsibilities is to oversee taxpayer dollars. This oversight includes ensuring tax dollars are spent properly once allocated to an organization, and that those investments are properly aligned with emerging community priorities.

For several years now, our ability to do this has been limited by a plethora of small funding streams with specific, sometimes limiting, requirements. The block grant model that is proposed in the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health's budget will give Boards across the state needed flexibility to target resources where they are needed in their service district. Not every Board area has all of the same needs, nor do they have all of the same resources. The proposed block grants will allow each Board to make strategic decisions, informed by their community planning processes, to invest in the services and supports needed in their communities.

We are supportive of the Department of Behavioral Health's investments in mental health and addiction services and supports. Last fiscal year, nearly 4,000 Lucas County residents received treatment services paid by the MHRSB using federal, state and local funds. This was a 28% increase over the year prior. State funds made up nearly 23% of the \$5.2 million cost of providing those services. In FY 25, early trends indicate a 7% increase over FY 24 numbers, with an estimated cost of \$5.9 million. With growing demand in our communities, we need ongoing support from the state.

I would like to briefly discuss the impact of Medicaid expansion on our system of care. As Medicaid expanded eligibility to cover more individuals through the Group VIII population, more individuals were able to access Medicaid covered addiction and mental health services. ADAMH Boards were able to use state and local funds to expand access to recovery support services, prevention programs, and other wrap around supports for individuals. Changes that reduce Medicaid funding or tighten eligibility could result in the need to roll back some of those same services in order to prioritize addressing the treatment needs for individuals with mental health and addiction disorders. For individuals and families, reductions in Medicaid coverage could lead to reduced access to care and services, increased out-of-pocket costs, longer wait times for services, and individuals delaying or skipping necessary care.

Finally, we are living in the information age. Comprehensive behavioral health data and information sharing is key to proper coordination of benefits and local planning, purchasing, evaluation and monitoring. As the Department is developing their plan to invest \$15 million in the first year of the biennium to address information technology and health information systems, Boards need to be involved. Efforts to modernize the data environment and consistently track outcomes are overdue. The ability to access and share information is needed in all parts of the system.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Should you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.