



**Interested Party Testimony- House Children and Human Services Committee
HB 96 — FY26-27 State Operating Budget
February 26, 2025**

Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Children and Human Services Committee — Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96. My name is Maggie Hallett, and I am the Associate Director of Mental Health America of Ohio.

As Tonya shared, we are aligned with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and their proposed budget. I want to share two more priority areas for your consideration.

I would first like to talk about our work in the behavioral health workforce. We recognize that Ohio's behavioral health workforce is under significant stress, with frontline staff facing unmanageable workloads and burnout and organizations dealing with high levels of turnover.

To ensure quality care for those in need, it is essential that we create a better working environment for these dedicated professionals. By addressing workforce challenges, such as supporting realistic workloads, increasing compensation, and providing opportunities for professional growth, we can help reduce turnover and ensure that our behavioral health system remains strong and effective in serving the people of Ohio.

For almost a decade, MHAOhio has been helping behavioral health agencies across Ohio identify and address their unique workforce challenges. Through this work we've come to deeply understand the most significant issues facing the behavioral health workforce, many of which are systemic. In addition to supporting agencies on an individual basis, MHAOhio is committed to addressing the pervasive system-wide challenges to help improve retention rates, employee satisfaction, and, ultimately, client care.

We support agency leaders by identifying the issues that matter most to their employees, making realistic recommendations for improvement, and helping with implementation planning. We develop deep and trusting relationships, leading many organizations to rely on our assessments and recommendations year after year.

Since 2017, we have surveyed and conducted focus groups with over 16,000 employees, representing more than 25,500 employees. Through this work, we've learned that:

- The strain of understaffed teams places an additional burden on committed, high-performing staff, leading to burnout and reduced morale.
- Unrealistic productivity requirements and high caseloads further exacerbate the issue, resulting in diminished quality of care for clients.

- 71% of employees feel their low pay directly impacts their job satisfaction and turnover intention.
- The lack of time to process secondary trauma creates additional overwhelm for staff.
- Supervisors, who are vital to the health of an agency, are often not adequately trained or supported, with many still managing their own caseloads.

We must continue to support the behavioral health workforce to ensure they have the resources and environment needed to provide quality care and prevent burnout.

Last, I would like to talk about the importance of Peer Recovery Supporters

Peers are uniquely qualified to provide an important factor in an individual's path to recovery. That factor is *hope*. When someone who is struggling gets support from someone who has been there – who has walked in their shoes and is now succeeding and thriving – it can be incredibly motivating. Peers help people feel seen, heard and understood without judgment - which are all protective factors in keeping individuals engaged in treatment.

Research backs that Peer Recovery Supporters (PRS) have a transformative effect on both individuals and systems. Peer support has been shown to:

- Improve the quality of life for clients
- Improve their engagement and satisfaction with services and supports
- Improve whole health, including chronic conditions like diabetes
- Decrease hospitalizations and inpatient days
- Reduce the overall cost of services

Peer support empowers people to make the best decisions for them and to strive towards their goals in their communities. PRS are an essential component of recovery-focused systems and are key across all settings and stages of recovery.

As you are considering the budget, we ask that you keep in mind these three priorities: perinatal mental health, behavioral health workforce, and peer recovery supporters.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

Maggie Hallett
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