

## House Children and Human Services Committee Testimony

March 4, 2025

11:15 A.M.

- Chair White, Vice Chair Salvo, Ranking Member Lett, and members of the Children and Human Services Committee. Thank you for allowing me to testify as a business leader in favor of the Governor's Budget Proposal around mental health and suicide prevention.
- My name is Dave Rife, and I am the Vice President of Manufacturing at White Castle, headquartered in Columbus. My grandfather started White Castle with a dream of making the best burgers and serving his community.
- I am here today to talk about business and the need for investments in mental health in Ohio's budget. We are a company of approximately 10,000 employees, and each of those employees is crucial to making our business work. Whether it is our restaurant workers who interact with our customers and create a friendly and welcoming environment or our corporate office employees creating opportunities for growth, or our manufacturing employees who put together sliders when you get a taste for a slider at home, we know that good and healthy employees create a healthy and successful business.
- Our commitment to mental health is also top of mind when we think about those who work for us and the communities that we serve. We know that a healthy workforce leads to better attendance rates, increased productivity, and happier customers who will come back.
- We also realize that mental health can impact anyone. Nearly 1-in-4 U.S. adults report experiencing a mental health condition each year. In the last year, only half of adults in need of mental health services accessed them, and youth, our future workforce, experiencing mental health challenges, fared even worse – with only 43.9% receiving treatment in the past year.
- Untreated mental health issues lead to higher rates of absenteeism, decreased productivity, reduced participation in the workforce, and unemployment. Workers with mild untreated mental illness miss an average of 9.3 hours of work per week, while those with serious mental illness miss 12.5 hours,<sup>i</sup> and family caregivers of those living with disabling mental illness spend an average of 32.5 hours of unpaid caregiving each week.<sup>ii</sup> In addition to these individual impacts, 53% of working

parents miss at least one day of work per month to address their child's mental health needs, significantly impacting economic outputs.<sup>iii</sup>

- The cost to the U.S. economy of untreated mental health challenges is nearly \$300 billion, primarily due to 1) lost productivity and 2) higher healthcare expenditures.<sup>iv</sup> While this economic burden of untreated mental health issues is significant, the return on investment in behavioral health care is equally substantial. For every \$1 spent on mental health treatment, there is an average return of \$4 in improved health and productivity.<sup>v</sup> The increased workplace productivity resulting from improved access to mental health supports alone would add \$53 billion in economic output annually by reducing workplace absenteeism and lost productivity from working while sick.<sup>vi</sup>
- At White Castle, here is how we promote mental health wellness in our workforce:
  - First, we start by openly talking about it and having posters in our break rooms.
  - We have created a Team member resource guide for our team member app and printed warning signs, and we have trained all of our GMs on warning signs.
  - We finally also list the resources available to team members, which include 988, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and team member assistance information.
- White Castle knows that healthy people work.
- I have said that we have taken my grandfather's mantra of investing in employees and the community, but mental health has also touched me very personally.
- Mental health touches everyone. No one is immune.
- Investing in mental health and substance use care is a sound public policy and a wise economic strategy. Addressing mental health and substance use disorders increases workforce participation and stimulates economic growth by improving productivity, reducing health care costs, and increasing tax revenues while also improving individual well-being. As states like Ohio seek to remain competitive and build thriving economies, prioritizing investment in comprehensive mental health and substance use services is essential to cultivating a healthy workforce and fostering long-term economic stability and prosperity. Supporting the Governor's

investment in mental health in the budget improves the lives of individuals and is crucial for business and commerce in Ohio.

- Thank you for allowing me to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>i</sup> Abramson, B., Boerma, J., & Tsyvinski, A. (2024). *Macroeconomics of Mental Health*. Cambridge MA: National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w32354>

<sup>ii</sup> AARP and National Alliance for Caregiving. (2020). *Caregiving in the United States*. Washington D.C.: AARP. doi: [10.26419/ppi.00103.001](https://doi.org/10.26419/ppi.00103.001)

<sup>iii</sup> On Our Sleeves. (2022). *The Great Collide: The Impact of Children's Mental Health on the Workforce*. Retrieved from [www.onoursleeves.org](http://www.onoursleeves.org)

<sup>iv</sup> Abramson, B., Boerma, J., & Tsyvinski, A. (2024). *Macroeconomics of Mental Health*. Cambridge MA: National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w32354>

<sup>v</sup> The Lancet Global Health. (2020). Mental Health Matters. 8(11). doi: [10.1016/S2214-109X\(20\)30432-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30432-0)

<sup>vi</sup> Deloitte Center for Health Solutions. (2022). *The Economic Burden of Mental Health Inequities*. Nashville TN: Meharry School of Global Health. Retrieved from <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/health-care/economic-burden-mental-health-inequities.html>