

**Interested Party Testimony
Ohio State Medical Association
HB 96– State Operating Budget
Ohio House Health Committee
Presented by Monica Hueckel, VP, Advocacy**

March 5, 2025

Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee, my name is Monica Hueckel and I am here on behalf of the Ohio State Medical Association (OSMA), the state's largest professional organization representing Ohio physicians, medical residents, and medical students all across the state. We are grateful for the opportunity to testify today regarding House Bill 96.

The state budget deliberations are a great opportunity to highlight and advance one of OSMA's main priorities as an organization, access to care for patients. It is among our highest priorities that we work collaboratively to ensure patients in Ohio's communities are able to access the high quality care they need, and this is of particular concern for vulnerable communities in rural and/or underserved areas. We know you all share this priority.

OSMA is thankful to Governor DeWine for the inclusion of funding promoting mental health care in Ohio in the executive budget plan, including funding for the Ohio's 988 Suicide and Crisis Hotline, for widespread access to mobile mental health crisis services, and for helping to address the lack of available beds in state psychiatric hospitals. These are key items that represent several impactful steps Ohio can take to help effectively and safely meet the rising demand for mental health care in the state, including in counties that currently do not have adequate services available.

We are also thankful for the continued investments in public health, including increased taxes on cigarettes (which will help fund a new refundable tax credit for working families with young children), and funding for OhioSEE, a program which will provide eye exams and glasses to kids in kindergarten through third grade who fail vision screenings. OhioSEE seeks to provide comprehensive eye exams at Ohio schools and distribute glasses to children who need them in order to combat vision problems in youth which if undetected or untreated, can cause literacy issues as well as behavioral health problems. These are simple and meaningful steps we can take to help our communities achieve healthier outcomes for Ohioans.

Additionally, we appreciate the provisions included in the executive budget which provide additional funding to the Ohio Physician Loan Repayment Program. This is a critical program which helps boost primary care access by aiding primary care physicians in paying back their medical school loans in exchange for those physicians working in underserved areas.

Another area in which Ohio can bolster patient access to care in the budget is with regard to funding for medical residency slots. After students complete medical school, they are required to complete a

residency program as part of their training. This residency training usually takes about 3 to 5 years. An overwhelming majority of residents tend to stay and practice in the state where they complete their residency. Unfortunately, there are currently more medical school graduates than available residency slots in Ohio. Ohio's quantity of slots has mostly remained unchanged for decades, meaning it is unable to meet the demand. The majority of our medical students leave Ohio to do their residencies outside of the state, and most do not return once their training is complete. It is extremely important that Ohio prioritize training as many physicians in residency as possible here, giving them a better chance to stay and serve our communities. The number of residency slots is largely controlled at the federal level, but states, including Ohio, can add additional slots by funding those slots through the state's budget.

We believe that an additional \$10 million in funding, specifically slated for residency slots in primary care and psychiatry, would help to meet a crucial need for our state and provide high quality medical care for Ohioans. We ask that such an amendment be considered in order to further aid in securing the future of Ohio's physician workforce.

In these continued and important conversations regarding access to care, we also want to emphasize the positive licensure numbers of all of Ohio's healthcare providers. The budget red books are great at highlighting for us where the increases and decreases are in terms of workforce for those serving Ohio's healthcare needs. We are happy to see the numbers of providers increasing in the state of Ohio. From our physicians and nurses to our physician assistants and optometrists, the budget red books showcase an increase from 2022 to 2024 in almost every provider type. OSMA has long championed team-based approach to care because working together in a collaborative model is the best way to coordinate treatment effectively and take advantage of the skills and training of each member of the team. We believe the budget red books highlight this team-based model is working and encouraging others to invest in becoming healthcare providers in Ohio.

OSMA is thankful to members of the committee for your attention to our comments on this legislation, and appreciates the opportunity to be a meaningful contributor to the legislative process. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.