



**Ohio School-Based Health Alliance**  
**House Health Committee**  
House Bill 96 FY26-27 State Operating Budget  
Interested Party Testimony  
March 5, 2025

Good morning Chair Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and Members of the House Health Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill 96, the SFY 26-27 operating budget.

My name is Reem Aly, and I am the Executive Director of the Ohio School-Based Health Alliance ("Ohio Alliance"). The Ohio Alliance serves as the only statewide, independent, nonpartisan organization created to improve access to comprehensive, integrated, sustainable health services through school-based health care.

The Ohio Alliance **supports the proposed appropriation of \$20 million over the 2026 and 2027 State Fiscal Years for school-based health centers** to ensure students have access to the critical healthcare services they need. The Ohio Alliance also respectfully requests your consideration to **designate \$1M for the creation of a statewide data hub for the state-level reporting, tracking, and evaluation of SBHCs**, and designate the task of developing the data hub to the Ohio Alliance.

***School-based health center overview***

Across Ohio, school-based health centers serve as a leading, sustainable model for advancing school-based health care and connecting children to critical healthcare services. School-based health centers are created through a partnership between a school/school district and a healthcare provider to provide access to, at minimum, comprehensive primary care services to students on a school campus. This collaborative healthcare and education partnership puts students and families at the heart of its services and is transformational in closing gaps in care and improving health and education outcomes.

School-based health centers provide comprehensive primary healthcare services to students and may deliver additional services, including behavioral, vision, and oral health services. While these centers prioritize serving students in the school or district in which they are located, they may also extend services to students' families, school personnel, and community members. We emphasize that in many communities that are underserved, such as rural Ohio or Appalachia, school-based health centers may be the **only** available healthcare provider for students and the broader community. According to the Ohio Alliance's SBHC census, during the 2023-2024 school year, 106 **school-based health**



center sites reported serving more than 50,000 children and 19,000 community members statewide.

### *Need for school-based health centers*

Ohio's children continue to face challenges with school attendance and accessing care. **One in four (25.6%) of Ohio's students were chronically absent during the 2023-2024 school year<sup>1</sup> and more than one in five (21.8%) did not have a place to go or consult when they were sick.<sup>2</sup>** By placing children at the center of services, delivering care in a safe and nurturing environment, and removing barriers to accessing health care, school-based health centers:

- **Keep kids healthy and in school** so their education is not interrupted
- **Reduce high costs to the healthcare system and Medicaid** by decreasing emergency department visits, hospitalizations, and improving care coordination and medication management
- **Support parents or guardians to stay at work** so they are better able to earn income for their families, and prevent work productivity loss for employers.

Expansion of the SBHC model would benefit many school districts in Ohio that continue to identify barriers to health care as an impediment to ensuring their students are in the classroom, healthy, and ready to learn.

### *Strengthening Ohio's school-based health center infrastructure*

**The Ohio Alliance fully supports the allocation of \$20M over the biennium under the Ohio Department of Health's Health Program Support line item for the expansion of SBHCs.** This line item is absolutely critical for the continued development of SBHCs and to ensure that every child has the opportunity to access the healthcare services they need.

To further strengthen Ohio's school-based health center infrastructure, **the Ohio Alliance also requests the creation of a statewide data hub for state-level reporting, tracking, and evaluation of school-based health centers.** There is currently no statewide electronic data infrastructure for the tracking and reporting of SBHC data. Creating a data hub provides an infrastructure to track and evaluate our state's substantial investment in school-based health centers and progress towards improving access to care for Ohio's children and communities. **The Ohio Alliance requests that language be added that the**

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<sup>1</sup> Chronic Absenteeism Trend." *Ohio Department of Education Reports*. Available at <https://reports.education.ohio.gov/report/report-card-data-state-attendance-rate-with-student-disagg>. Last accessed March 5, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> National Survey on Children's Health, 2022-2023. Available at [NSCH Interactive Data Query \(2016 – present\) - Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health \(childhealthdata.org\)](https://www.neschenr.org/data-research/NSCH-Interactive-Data-Query). Last accessed March 3, 2025.



**task of developing a school-based health center data hub be designated to the Ohio Alliance, with an allocation of \$1M over the biennium.**

The Ohio Alliance also supports the allocation of funding toward the Ohio Student Eye Exam Program, or OhioSEE, to provide students in kindergarten through third grade with vision care services and the Children's Dental Services Program to provide children in underserved areas with dental care services.

As an independent, neutral organization in school-based health care, the Ohio Alliance is uniquely situated and committed to providing technical assistance and support to Ohio's school-based health care partners at the state and local level. On behalf of the Ohio Alliance and our school-based health care partners, we appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

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