

**Written Testimony of Christine Koterba, Ph.D., ABPP  
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**The Brain Injury Association of Ohio**

**In Support of an Amendment to HB 96 to Increase Funding for the Ohio Brain Injury Program  
March 6, 2025**

Chairman Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and Members of the Health Committee,

Thank you for allowing us to submit testimony today in support of an amendment to the state budget that would increase funding for the Ohio Brain Injury Program to \$1.75 million. This investment would expand services to survivors through the Brain Injury Association of Ohio (BIAOH). My name is Christine Koterba; I am a pediatric neuropsychologist and serve on the board of the BIAOH and have nearly 20 years of experience working with children with brain injuries and their families.

Brain injury is a significant public health concern impacting at least one in four Ohioans and extending across all ages and across all demographic groups. The term brain injury encompasses traumatic brain injuries, strokes, brain tumors, and injuries sustained due to drug overdose and loss of oxygen. Following brain injuries, individuals can experience a wide range of debilitating medical, physical, cognitive, and neurobehavioral impairments that can lead to long-term and in the most severe cases, permanent disability. These impairments can make it nearly impossible for individuals to fully function at home, in the community, and at school and work.

Almost 20 years ago, in November 2004, my younger sister, Margaux, experienced a stroke when she was 16 years old. After a month in the hospital, Margaux died as a result of her injury. After her death, I was left wondering what life would have been like for Margaux and our family had she survived. This experience led me to pursue a career working with children with severe brain injuries and their families. Since Margaux's death, I have seen how medical advances have improved survival rates of severe brain injuries and I have worked with countless children and families in the acute recovery period, as well as years after their injuries. I have seen firsthand how children and families receive the highest level of support, care, and resources in the hospital, only to be left out in the cold after they leave.

In research studies I have conducted with parents, they share feeling like they have "been thrown out the wolves" after leaving the hospital. They feel like their world is "falling apart" as they struggle to work, care for their child with a brain injury, and parent other children in the home. They feel as if their child with a brain injury is a completely different person with new behavior problems that are challenging to manage. Families have told me that they struggle to find physicians, rehabilitation therapists, educators, and mental health providers with adequate training and expertise to address the unique challenges associated with brain injury. Oftentimes, primary caregivers are forced to navigate a new and complex world alone to find care for their loved one. Many times, they come up empty because the resources are just not available.

Brain-injury related medical needs, along with significant mental health challenges, can cause patients to get bounced from one department or facility to another because few providers have the expertise to manage brain injury, especially in Ohio. BIAOH is trying to change that by helping connect survivors to vital resources and support them in their ongoing recovery. Our goal is to help individuals with brain injury achieve the highest level of independence and quality of life. With better support and resources, we can improve outcomes, reduce longterm costs, and facilitate ongoing recovery. However, we just don't have enough to provide the support that is needed and that's where you come in.

Funding for brain injury resources in our state is among the lowest in the nation. State expenditures for brain injury equal just 5 cents for each Ohioan, which amounts to just over \$500,000 per year that is dedicated to brain injury. Some of our neighboring states are vastly outpacing us providing 20 to 30 times more than we provide here in Ohio. Other states, like Virginia, have written over \$1.5 million into their budget to create a dedicated neurobehavioral facility which can serve individuals with brain injury. Specialized care and resources can help people with brain injury successfully and safely get back home, into the community, and return to school and work.

### **State Funding for Persons with Brain Injury in Ohio and Surrounding States**

Prepared by the Ohio Brain Injury Program

	<b>2020 State Population</b>	<b>State Expenditures for Brain Injury</b>	<b>State Expenditures per Resident</b>
Ohio—current	11.8M	\$ .6M	5¢
Ohio—proposed	11.8M	\$1.8M	15¢
Pennsylvania	13.0M	\$5.4M	42¢
Indiana	6.7M	\$6.3M	94¢
West Virginia	1.8M	\$2.6M	\$1.46
Kentucky	4.5M	\$49.2M	\$5.27

In my work with the association and my work with the youngest Ohioans impacted by brain injury, I have seen the impact that increased funding could make. BIAOH funding supports vital services which help survivors and caregivers navigate complex systems, access resources, and improve their quality of life. However, despite our best efforts, Ohio's current level of investment is just not enough. Every day, we are forced to send Ohio residents out of state to receive services that simply do not exist here. We must do better.

With this proposed funding increase, we will:

- Expand services statewide to ensure survivors receive the care they need.
- Support children returning to school with an evidence based program, as well as support adults re-entering the workforce.
- Improve mental healthcare access for brain injury survivors.

- Reduce unnecessary institutionalization by helping survivors regain independence through community-based services.

Brain injury does not discriminate. It can happen to anyone, young or old. But with the right resources and support, recovery is possible. Investing in brain injury services not only improves outcomes for survivors and their families but also reduces long-term healthcare costs for our state. Thank you for considering this request as I come to you not just on behalf of BIAOH but also on behalf of those who cannot be here in person. For the mother who is working day and night to find a placement for her son with severe behavioral problems, for the parents who are providing care for their daughter around the clock juggling work and getting her to and from therapies, and for those who have to decide between keeping their job or caring for their child with a new brain injury.

#### Citations

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