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In Support of an Amendment to HB 96 to Increase Funding for the Ohio Brain Injury Program
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Chairman Schmidt, Vice Chair Deeter, Ranking Member Somani, and Members of the Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide 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 direct services to survivors through the Brain Injury Association of Ohio (BIAOH), ensuring that Ohioans with brain injuries receive the support they need to rebuild their lives.

Brain injury is a significant public health concern. One in four Ohioans has suffered at least one traumatic brain injury (TBI) in their lifetime, and many more have experienced acquired brain injuries such as stroke, drug overdose, strangulation, and brain tumors. Brain injuries occur in a variety of ways, and they impact individuals across all demographics and stages of life.

Ohio currently funds brain injury services at just five cents per resident, while Pennsylvania invests 42 cents per resident—over eight times as much. Due to this lack of funding, every day BIAOH must refer Ohioans to other states for services that should exist here at home. The most common causes of TBI in Ohio are falls and motor vehicle accidents, demonstrating that brain injury can truly happen to anyone at any time.

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

Prepared by the Ohio Brain Injury Program

	2020 State Population	State Expenditures for Brain Injury	State Expenditures per Resident
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

I myself am a survivor of a traumatic brain injury caused by a severe motor vehicle accident that nearly killed me in October 2013. Doctors initially told my parents after the accident that I would most likely need to live in a nursing home for the rest of my life. If this had been the case, I am sure I would have needed public assistance in the forms of unemployment and medical insurance

benefits. Instead, I have been a taxpaying professor at Ohio University for three years since 2022; I moved into a home I bought with my wife in Reynoldsburg, Ohio this past summer. And before that, I was contributing to the state as a graduate student at Ohio University and The Ohio State University where I earned my PhD.

This outcome would not have been possible without the support of programs like those offered by BIAOH. While I was lucky that my parents had connections that ultimately helped me get the care I needed at Dodd Hall at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center, many other TBI survivors are not so fortunate. By connecting survivors to the care they need, BIAOH helps survivors get back to living meaningful lives as community and family members, workers, and even taxpayers.

In my recovery, I needed to navigate working with speech, occupational, physical, and rehabilitation therapists at three different facilities. I needed to see a neurologist and meet regularly with my primary care physician and my physical medicine and rehabilitation doctor. At one point I even had to visit a couple of optometrists because there was concern that my vision had been impacted. These appointments were all held in Ohio where my parents lived, but meanwhile I also had to extricate myself from the life I had started to build for myself in Detroit, Michigan, including a job and an apartment.

If all of this sounds complicated, that's because it was. Connecting with programs like those offered by BIAOH would have provided a roadmap for me and my parents as we found the care I needed.

While this amendment might seem like a spending increase, my story suggests that it could actually save the state money as there would be less need for public assistance and TBI survivors would get back to work sooner. Remember doctors initially thought I would never work again. By increasing funding for the Brain Injury Program, the state can ensure that more brain injury survivors get the necessary care they need.

Brain injury can happen to anyone at any stage of life. It is unpredictable, life-altering, and often invisible. Without proper support, survivors face significant barriers to recovery, employment, and independent living. By increasing funding for the Ohio Brain Injury Program, we have the opportunity to make a meaningful impact in the lives of thousands of Ohioans.

BIAOH provides vital services that 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 inadequate. 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, regardless of where they live.
- Support children returning to school and 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.

I urge you to support this amendment to ensure that Ohio's brain injury survivors receive the care, support, and services they need to reclaim their lives. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have. You are welcome to email me at spencer@smithbrainconnections.com.