

## Testimony Prepared for Ohio Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

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By Chief Dan Meloy

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I am from **Colerain Township, Southwest Ohio**, where I served as Chief of Police, Director of Public Safety, and Township Administrator. Through these roles, I gained a deep understanding of what residents expect from their local government — especially in how we respond to the opioid crisis. No matter the "hat" I was wearing, there was one consistent message from our first responder and our community. **Our communities must work together to help, connect, and serve individuals and families in crisis.**

**We began that work in Colerain in 2013.** It started while I was serving as the Chief of Public Safety. In that role, I did an analysis of runs of police, fire and EMS and found that we had a concentration of “frequent fliers,” where we would repetitively be called day over day, week over week and month over month. When I set out to find out if they had common issues, addiction was a recurrent theme, along with mental health issues and related domestic violence. We decided we had to do something differently. For us that was a Quick Response Team, or QRT.

In January 2016, Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine invited more than 1,000 police, fire, and EMS leaders to a church in Columbus. It was cold, snow was on the ground, and the church was full — I was one of nearly 1,000 leaders in attendance. That day, we heard a powerful call to action:

**"Ohio is the epicenter of this epidemic" — and we were challenged to "get to work."**

Approximately 20 months later, in September 2017, Lucas County Sheriff John Tharp and I stood at a press conference alongside Attorney General DeWine and law enforcement leaders from across the state as Governor DeWine announced a **\$3 million investment** to launch DART and QRT teams statewide. At that time, many of Ohio’s leaders were wrestling with how to respond to the growing addiction crisis, struggling to find solutions, and figuring out how best to support both the community and our first responders.

Since that day in 2017, Ohio has seen **tremendous growth** in DART, QRT, Community Paramedicine, and other collaborative response efforts. The number of teams has **more than doubled** — today, there are more than **80 teams** operating across the state.

In 2022, we formally launched the **Ohio Deflection Association (ODA)** to connect, represent, and strengthen these teams. As our work expanded, we understood the importance of tracking meaningful data to demonstrate impact. Ohio rose to that challenge as well:

- In July 2017, we met the CEO of Cordata, who, after meeting and listening to what QRT and DART teams were providing our communities, offered the use of their complex health care and disease coordination platform to help us navigate and understand how to best serve our communities. The next day, Cordata engineers were riding with the QRT team in Colerain to ask questions, and learn about how these teams work and serve.
- In 2019, 19 counties adopted that same data platform.
- That availability of the platform expanded to 52 counties, then 84, and today **all 88 counties** have access to the training and support of **a standardized care coordination and data integration system** — Cordata.
- This system allows us to better understand our communities' needs, measure outcomes, and learn how to intervene earlier in the disease progression — at what we now strive to better understand, "Stage One" of addiction.

Since 2017:

- **Over 66,000 referrals** have been made to QRT and DART teams,
- **Thousands of individuals and families** have been connected to services,
- **Data from Montgomery County** confirms what we knew all along: **we are saving lives and creating safer communities.**

Ohio's model has gained **national attention**.

At the 2025 ODA Summit in Cincinnati, we welcomed attendees from **14 states and Canada** — leaders who traveled here to learn how Ohio is learning, and expanding how we serve our communities, through deflection and pre-arrest diversion efforts.

And it all began with the **\$3 million investment** from the State of Ohio in 2017.

Many teams from across Ohio have worked tirelessly to be **good stewards** of that initial investment. Which is why, today — eight years later, after all this growth and success — we

are respectfully asking for the **same amount.... \$3 million** to sustain all this commitment and service to Ohio.

Over the past eight years:

- We have fought hard in our communities to serve people in crisis.
- We have supported our teams, Police, Fire/EMS departments, and the families and residents they serve.
- We have learned to write and manage grants, advocate at the local, state, and national levels, and navigate complex budget processes.
- We have educated and partnered with businesses, foundations, and civic groups — while continuing to deliver direct services every day.

And yet, **each budget cycle**, we face uncertainty about whether the funding we depend on will continue. Each cycle, we must reintroduce ourselves to new decision-makers, explaining why this work matters, why consistent data matters, and why getting closer to understanding "Stage One" is critical to saving lives.

While we receive verbal support, too often financial commitment does not follow. Eight years ago, Governor DeWine challenged us as public safety leaders to think differently — to look beyond arrest as the only option. The leaders of Ohio, past and present heard the calling and understand the importance of “service above self.”

"Thank you to the early investment made in 2017, Ohio has built a model that the rest of the country now looks to as a vision for their own communities — states like Wisconsin and many others are watching, listening and learning from our example.

Our QRT, DART, and deflection teams are saving lives, easing the strain on jails and emergency rooms, supporting local businesses, and strengthening the bonds between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

We are proud of the progress Ohio has made — and we know we can continue to lead.

Today, we are simply asking for your partnership to sustain the momentum we've built. With your support, we can continue to turn challenges into hope, and opportunities into lasting change for the people of Ohio."