

Testimony on SFY 26/27 Operating Budget Senate Finance Committee

Chairman Cirino, Vice-Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and esteemed committee members, I want to thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to you today.

My name is Anthony Kukura, and I am the Director of Governmental Affairs at I Am Boundless Inc. Over the past four years I have had the privilege of working at I Am Boundless, one of Ohio's largest health and human services organizations. Boundless provides residential, transportation, day programming, and behavioral health services to adults and children with developmental disabilities. Boundless has also recently ventured into primary care and dental services built around the complex needs of the population organizations like Boundless serve.

Today, I would like to bring attention to the funds allocated to our industry in the operating budget before the General Assembly. HB96 preserves critical investments that were made in our service system via the last state operating budget passed in 2023. That legislation contained historic increases in Medicaid reimbursement rates for developmental disability and behavioral health services. This investment helped organizations like Boundless recover from the COVID-19 pandemic by providing workforce stabilization and financial stability.

I speak for many working in this industry that we have been tremendously grateful for the generous investment the General Assembly made in our service system via the last state budget. To ensure the continued stabilization of these critical services, it is vital that the funding levels for our service system be maintained.

In addition to maintaining the investment that was made in our service array via HB33, we also encourage the Senate to consider the following additional improvements that would benefit our service system:

- There currently is no mechanism in place that provides long-term financial stability for Waiver funded Intellectual and Developmental Disability services. While the investment this body has made via HB33 has allowed providers to recover from a crisis level position, there is still no long-term solution to our funding model. We would like to work with and partner with this General Assembly to explore fiscally responsible and future focused ideas that could provide long term sustainability. This is specifically needed for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waiver programming.
- Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) are homes for people with disabilities that provide the care and support they need. To do this well, ICFs need equipment like wheelchair-accessible vans, medical beds, lifts, and other tools that help people live safely and be part of their communities. Right now, there's a spending limit (called a "ceiling") on how much help ICFs can get paying for this equipment. This limit hasn't changed since 2017. Boundless supports an amendment to allow a reasonable increase to the ICF equipment

ceiling to align with actual costs and ensure residents have access to safe, reliable equipment that supports full participation in community life.

- Medicaid provider rate increase of 5% each fiscal year for community mental health and substance use treatment providers (Medicaid Provider Types 84/95). These Rate increases would build on the investments made in the prior budget for community BH providers to defray costs associated with inflation and an increasingly competitive labor market due to a shortage of behavioral health professionals in Ohio. Even with the investments already made, Boundless continues to experience significant challenges in recruiting behavioral health professionals to provide care for the vulnerable populations that our organization serves.
- Request \$10 million in OhioMHAS budget (continuum of care line) to be distributed to certified community BH providers to support additional workforce strategies, such as recruitment and retention bonuses; supervision costs; other workforce strategies.
- Rename the Chemical Dependency Professionals Board the “Ohio Behavioral Health Professionals Board” and make changes throughout chapter 4758. Establish a mental health credential for already existing workforce; create degree and non-degree career pathway for community mental health sector; and establish quality standards and strengthen consumer protections. (\$500,000 GRF to support establishment of credential and Board administrative costs)
- Maintain Recreational Marijuana Tax Revenue Distribution of 25% being directed to Department of Behavioral Health to support prevention, substance use treatment, and recovery supports.
- Maintain SWSF investment and strengthen transparency and guard rails around directing such funds to behavioral health services in schools.

Working in this industry is a calling, and one that everyone who works at this organization feels personally. Adults and children with IDD and behavioral health challenges deserve to live in and be a productive and active part of their own communities. They deserve a life of dignity and respect. The services we provide throughout Ohio are essential, and in fact our model is more economically responsible than alternatives such as nursing homes and large institutions. My mother was a special education teacher for many years. I grew up understanding that everyone, regardless of disability or diagnosis, deserves a chance to be a contributing member of their community and that our communities and lives of all citizens are made better when this happens. When the opportunity presented itself to work at an organization like Boundless, I knew it was where I was meant to end up. Organizations like Boundless have greatly enhanced the lives of the people with IDD and behavioral health needs in Ohio, and because of the support we provide, both the length and quality of life for these individuals has been improved.

Your support in ensuring the continued stability of these vital services would be a tremendous aid to an organization that operates throughout Ohio, providing vital services to thousands of Ohioans and their families.

Thank you again for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you and if I can ever be of any help in this process, please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anthony Kukura".

Anthony Kukura

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