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Testimony of Marla Morse, Executive Director, Oral Health Ohio

Before the Senate Finance Committee

June 6, 2025

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee, my name is Marla Morse, and I am the Executive Director of Oral Health Ohio, a coalition of statewide partners who advocate for and educate to improve the oral health of Ohioans. I am pleased to provide written interested party testimony on HB 96 (Operating Budget).

We appreciate the decision to maintain funding for crucial oral health initiatives like the Dentist and Dental Hygienist Loan Repayment Program, Ohio State Dental Board, Ohio Primary Workforce Initiative, and the Medicaid Director's authority to transfer up to \$4 million over the biennium for children's dental services to the Ohio Department of Health.

We strongly oppose the elimination of the Children's Dental Services Program (GRF 440497). This cut jeopardizes vital mobile and portable dental services for children in counties with limited access to dental services. Dental disease affects over 50% of third graders in Ohio, with low-income, Medicaid-covered, and uninsured children suffering the most. These children desperately need care for pain and infection, services this program would provide.

We strongly urge you to reinstate the \$6 million in biennial funding for the Children's Dental Services Program, as included in the House-passed budget. Oral health is fundamental to overall well-being, and tooth decay — a preventable disease — significantly impacts children's development, confidence, and academic success, especially in rural areas.

We also strongly urge you to reinstate the full \$20 million in biennial funding for School-Based Health Centers (SBHCs), as included in the House-passed budget, to support their growth and long-term sustainability. This investment reflects the growing need for school-based health centers and ensures students continue receiving healthcare where and when they need it most.

Sincerely,

Marla Morse, MSW, MPA  
Executive Director

*Advocating & Educating to Improve Oral Health.*