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**Senate Finance Committee**  
**Testimony on HB 96 (SFY 2026-27 Operating Budget)**  
**June 6, 2025**

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Chavez, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Finance Committee thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 96. My name is Hattie Tracy and I am the President and CEO of Coleman Health Services. Coleman Health Services is a behavioral health agency serving 58 Ohio Counties, providing psychiatry, counseling, case management, peer, employment, Ohio Rise CME and housing services. We also provide a full continuum of office and community-based crisis services. Coleman operates 2 988 call centers that answer 988 calls for 19 Ohio counties and respond to 988 texts/chats for the entire state of Ohio.

**988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline Funding**

I want to thank Governor DeWine and the Ohio General Assembly for the recent investments and efforts to develop and strengthen the community behavioral health system of care in Ohio. At Coleman we see firsthand the positive impact these investments have on Ohioans' lives every day. We strongly support the resources aimed at expanding access to medications in jail settings, enhanced community forensic services, and efforts to ease access to the state hospital system for civil patients. We must do more to develop and strengthen our crisis system so that Ohioans have someone to call when they believe that dying is better than living, someone to provide a trauma informed compassionate response, and somewhere safe to go where treatment, recovery, and access to services is prioritized. We must do more to provide a treatment response for Ohioans that supports our criminal justice system.

Additionally, I want to express our strong support for the expansion of 988 and the crisis infrastructure that includes mobile response and stabilization services (MRSS) for youth and new mobile services for adults. However, I want to bring to the committee's attention the need for additional funding for the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. The House reduced the executive budget proposal funding for 988 by a significant amount – down to \$20 million each fiscal year, which is below current operational costs. Calls to 988 increase month-over-month and an actuarial study commissioned by OhioMHAS anticipates a 29% increase in call volume in state fiscal years 26 and 27.

Since January 1, 2024, Coleman staff have answered 29, 892 calls, texts, and chats through 988 call centers. 373 of those interactions required an active rescue where law enforcement assistance was requested for a response. Less than 1% of calls/chats through 988 needed interventions outside of the behavioral health system of care.

At Coleman, we believe you tell the story through the Ohioans we serve. I want to share two of those stories with you now:

1. Our 988 staff received a call from an Ohioan who wanted to die and had a clear plan and intent to carry out that plan. The individual reported that they had a loaded firearm to their head and felt that life was no longer worth living. The individual was very tearful and remorseful on the call and let us know they had already said goodbye to their parents. Our staff engaged with this individual using reflective listening, they were empathetic, compassionate, and met them where they were. They worked to redirect the individual and focus on protective factors in their life. At

the same time our staff contacted law enforcement to complete an active rescue. Our staff stayed on the line, continuing to identify protective factors and focusing on the individuals' strengths. When law enforcement arrived, they were able to remove the weapon from the individuals' lap and our staff were able to stay online to support both the individual and law enforcement and continue to de-escalate the situation and to ensure the client received mental health treatment.

2. One of our 988 text/chat staff began an interaction with a young Ohioan who reported ongoing thoughts of death and self-harm. Our staff engaged the young person to assess their plan and intent to self-harm, asking vital questions regarding timing and intensity of self-harm in order to determine whether or not the young person needed immediate medical attention. Fortunately, this time they did not require medical attention. The young Ohioan reported chronic thoughts of death due to family stressors, a recent breakup, and general feelings of loneliness. Our staff allowed the young person to process their experiences and emotions while providing active listening, empathy, and support. Our staff worked with them to create a safety plan which included counseling, outreach to their local crisis center, and identification of coping skills to provide the least restrictive but most effective care. The young person reported feeling better that they were in a more positive frame of mind at the end of the chat. They reported wanting to live and become a "high performance engine technician" and were focusing on plans, hopes, and dreams for their future.

The 988 suicide and crisis line is saving lives. Our ability to provide treatment interventions early on in a crisis allows all Ohioans to receive trauma informed compassionate care while decreasing reliance on an already strained criminal justice system to intervene. It provides Ohioans with direct access to life saving care that can move them from a place of barely surviving to thriving. We strongly urge the Senate to increase the appropriation of funds for 988 by restoring the amount to the Governor's executive proposal (*\$34 million in SFY 26 and \$41 million in SFY 27*) to support this critical service and continue saving lives.

## **Conclusion**

Investing in Ohioans mental health and substance use care, including crisis care, is sound public policy and wise economic strategy. Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony today.