

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, members of the Senate Health Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Molly O'Neill, I am the CEO of Ohio Citizen Advocates for Addiction Recovery (OCAAR).

OCAAR's mission to advocate for those in and seeking recovery from a substance use disorder to ensure political, social, educational, and economic equality.

Our work is focused on education, mobilization, advocacy, and training. By listening to our constituents, we can ensure that their expert voices are not just heard, but also valued and integral in every decision that affects us. As a woman in long-term recovery, I have recently celebrated 40 years of continuous recovery from substance use disorder. The voices of people with lived experience are the cornerstone of our work.

Today, I want to highlight the critical role of Recovery Support Services in our state's response to the addiction crisis. These services—including peer support, recovery housing, collegiate recovery communities and recovery community organizations—are essential in helping individuals grow and sustain long-term recovery.

Research shows that an individual's involvement in recovery support services through their 5th year of recovery results in an 85% reduction of risk of relapse.¹ Recovery support services like Recovery Community Organizations (RCOs) and Peer Support provide quality assistance to communities across the state. In fact, the Addiction Policy Forum released a report that established Recovery Community Organizations as a proven, evidence-based strategy in combatting the addiction epidemic, finding individuals who participate in RCOs showed improved health outcomes and sustained recovery. That individuals who engage in RCO services had low levels of relapse into substance use, of emergency room visits, and an increase in their capacity for successful, healthy lives. Peer support services support treatment and health outcomes which reduce rates of relapse, increase treatment retention and satisfaction.²

¹ https://odh.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/6a94aabe-ea77-4c01-8fd8-2abdd83b4ff8/2020%2BUnintentional%2BDrug%2BOverdose%2BAnnual%2BReport.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&C ONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18_K9I401S01H7F40QBNJU3SO1F56-6a94aabe-ea77-4c01-8fd8-2abdd83b4ff8-o2GcAjB

² <https://reports.addictionpolicy.org/evidence-based-strategies/patient-services#RCOs>

By investing in relatively low-cost recovery supports, we significantly reduce return-to-use rates and avoid costly cycles of acute treatment and crisis care. Recovery support services protect Ohio's investment to end the opioid epidemic. Through services like recovery housing, peer support, employment assistance, education, and connection to legal services in addition to recovery supports, which are vastly underfunded, we keep people healthy. Most services cannot be billed to Medicaid and many community-based providers struggle to find funding to maintain them.

Without these supports, individuals leaving treatment too often face barriers that push them back toward substance use, increasing the demand for high-dollar emergency and inpatient services. The return on investment is clear: every dollar spent on recovery supports saves the state multiple dollars in healthcare and criminal justice.

We appreciate the continued investment in recovery and recovery support services made by the State of Ohio and the General Assembly. Due to the changes in this budget cycle, we have many questions about how dollars will be allocated to essential recovery support services. We cannot afford to continue an approach that focuses only on crisis care while underfunding the long-term supports that make recovery sustainable. As Ohio looks at resource allocation and how best to serve our residents, recovery supports for people with substance use disorders must be strengthened and sustained. Ohio's recovery community is strong, resilient, and growing and the investment in long-term sustainability is where the smart money is allocated.

Thank you for your time and I would welcome any questions.