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**Ohio Peer Recovery Organizations (OhioPRO)**  
**Senate Health Committee**  
**Testimony on HB 96 (SFY 2026-27 Operating Budget)**  
**May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 96, the budget proposal for state fiscal years 2026-2027.

I am Michael J. Krause, Executive Director of Ohio Peer Recovery Organizations (OhioPRO). OhioPRO is a statewide advocacy association for Ohio's peer run organizations and, more generally, peer and recovery support services. OhioPRO's member organizations are Ohio's certified peer run organizations – those organizations governed by a voice of lived experience who provide community-based peer recovery supports services to individuals with a lived experience of mental health, substance use disorder, or co-occurring disorder by individuals also with a lived experience. As a person with a direct lived experience who is in recovery from the same, I personally know the value of peer recovery supports. I can confidently share that without the support of others to help guide me on my personal recovery journey, I would not be standing before you today. The power of sharing one's lived experience is undeniable. Peer support works, and I am living proof.

OhioPRO is also a member of the Coalition for Healthy Communities (a statewide behavioral health collaborative), and I serve as its chair. OhioPRO supports the CHC's unified agenda.

**Peer recovery supporters are an integral part of Ohio's behavioral health workforce.** Rooted in informal traditions of mutual aid and shared experience, **peer support** has evolved into formalized, evidence-based services that effectively address behavioral health challenges. Peer recovery support services are often delivered, although not exclusively, through Ohio's peer run organizations (PROs), dedicated to providing peer and other recovery supports in recovery-oriented, community-based settings. Other clinical and social service settings and systems also offer PRSS. PRS have been embedded in diverse settings such as inpatient and outpatient clinical treatment services, hospitals, emergency rooms, crisis services (including 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline call centers), peer respites, warmlines, reentry and parole, carceral settings, harm reduction services, schools, shelters, and even libraries.

Peers have become integral to Ohio’s behavioral health landscape, offering significant benefits to people seeking care, service providers, and systems. Despite this progress, gaps and barriers persist around the sustainability and accessibility of peer services. **Long-term investment in PROs and the peer workforce** is vital to establishing best practices, ensuring equitable access, identifying resource gaps and barriers in communities, and connecting individuals to a full continuum of support for recovery and well-being. With a commitment to invest in the peer workforce, Ohio will lead the way in creating communities where individuals and families can recover and thrive.

In addition to the benefits described above, growing the peer workforce and investing in PROs directly benefits various systems by:

- Reducing inpatient visits and crises
- Increase overall treatment capacity
- Improve treatment outcomes
- Increase engagement in treatment
- Reducing incarcerations

The benefits also result in cost-savings for various systems and organizations.

OhioPRO would like to address those policy initiatives and investments that are most impactful of its work.

### **Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**

OhioPRO applauds the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) for its efforts to develop, strengthen, and enhance the community behavioral health system of care, and we generally support the direction the department is moving toward in HB 96.

OhioPRO strongly supports the continued investment in the creation of peer run organizations. While the aggregate funding amount is a decrease from the funding authorized by the General Assembly in the last biennium, the funding demonstrates its continued commitment to support the recovery journey of Ohioans. It is our long-term goal to see that in every county, and in every community across the state, Ohioans have access to peer recovery support services and peer run organizations who provide those individuals community-based safe spaces to recover.

OhioMHAS has proposed to create six (6) block grants so that communities can benefit from more flexibility in the county board’s administration of those block grant dollars. While our peer run organizations work closely with, and are generally supported by, local Boards, we are awaiting additional details to ensure that investments in peer recovery supports and peer run organizations are protected and that there is accountability in the administration and distribution of those funds.



## **Ohio Chemical Dependency Professionals Board**

OhioPRO supports the transition of the peer recovery supporter certification credential from OhioMHAS to the Ohio Chemical Dependency Professionals Board (OCDPB). This transition has been coordinated by OhioMHAS and recognizes the value of peer support in engaging and sustaining recovery and elevates the professionalism of these essential workers. PRS want to be recognized as professionals for the integral services they provide. Furthermore, having a Board with the infrastructure necessary to enforce its code of ethics is necessary to preserve the integrity of the space. OCDPB has established infrastructure and experience in managing and administering multiple certifications, licenses, and endorsements.

As this Board's role has expanded in scope over time, a name change of the Board is now absolutely required.

### **OhioPRO strongly supports Amendment # SC\_136\_0735**

#### **Name change of the Ohio Chemical Dependency Professionals Board**

Individuals with a lived experience overcome their substance use disorders or mental health disorders in the face of unrelenting stigma. I know from personal experience how crippling that stigma can be. I think most everyone would agree that stigma is real. In fact, the State has made significant investment to combat stigma and those investments are much appreciated.

This committee heard Director Cornyn of OhioMHAS testify before you that the proposed name change of her own Department was supported because it is less stigmatizing and more inclusive. Yet, the name of the Chemical Dependency Board is both stigmatizing and not at all inclusive, especially of the mental health peer recovery supporter. During this time of transition of the peer certification to OCDPB, while simultaneously proposing to change the name of OhioMHAS, it is only prudent to change the name of the chemical dependency board to one that is less stigmatizing. The Ohio Behavioral Health Professionals Board is the changed name we support.

#### **Qualified Mental Health Credential**

The OCDPB would be a logical regulatory structure to support the entry-level mental health credential as it is designed in a manner consistent with the CDCA and LCDC II. In a recent survey, nearly 500 Ohio peer recovery supporter stakeholders reported limited career advancement opportunities for PRS. The creation of this credential supports workforce development and provides a career pathway for peer, among others.

The QMH Credentials creates a visible career pathway into the mental health sector, incorporating both degree and non-degree opportunities immediately following high school, as well as at various points across the professional experience and educational degree attainment. The credential is portable across employment sites and reduces training and retraining experiences each time the individual changes employers. It



opens new opportunities to create career- tech programs, apprenticeships, and career development initiatives specifically in the mental health sector that have been limited due to the lack of a viable credential below the Master's Degree level.

## **Conclusion**

Investing in mental health and substance use recovery supports is sound public policy and wise economic strategy.

OhioPRO looks forward to working with the DeWine Administration and lawmakers during this budget process to advance sound policies, and direct resources to support community behavioral health providers, and most importantly help Ohioans seeking mental health and substance use disorder services to find and sustain recovery. These investments help ensure Ohio has a healthy, productive workforce that can continue to attract businesses and great jobs that grow our economy so every child can reach their full potential, and individuals and families can flourish as they strive to reach their dreams.

OhioPRO thanks Governor DeWine for his leadership and commitment to Ohio's community behavioral health system. Throughout his tenure, Governor DeWine's commitment to build out a behavioral health system that was never fully built resonates loudly with the recovery community. The Governor understands the importance of giving a voice to the voiceless. By valuing what is shared by individuals like me who have received behavioral health services, Ohio's behavioral health system of care is better equipped to meet the behavioral health care needs of all Ohioans.

As we are appreciative of the commitment of the Governor, we are also grateful to the members of this committee and the entire Ohio General Assembly for your efforts in recent years to strengthen and expand access to behavioral health recovery support services for Ohioans in need

Thank you for your time and consideration today. I am happy to answer any questions.

For additional information about Peer Recovery Support and Peer Run Organizations, please see resources OhioPRO developed which are linked below.

[OhioPRO Investing in Peer Support Data.pdf](#)

[OhioPRO Valuing the Power of Peers.pdf](#)

[OhioPRO Funding and Sustaining the Integral Role of Peer Recovery Supporter.pdf](#)

