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Testimony before the Ohio Senate Health Committee

House Bill 96

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Chair Huffman, Vice Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of the State of Ohio Action for Resiliency Network, which is included in the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction's budget proposal.

My name is Luan Phan, MD, and I am the principal investigator of the State of Ohio Adversity and Resilience (SOAR) study. I am Chair of the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health at The Ohio State University College of Medicine, the Jeffrey Schottenstein Endowed Chair of Psychiatry and Resilience, and the Chief of Psychiatry Services for Ohio State Wexner Medical Center.

We know that Ohio has seen an alarming rise in mental illness, suicide, and deaths related to overdose during the past decade, and these mental health challenges impact entire families and communities. Importantly, due to these challenges, Ohioans are not living to their fullest potential at work and at home.

The SOAR study is a first-of-its-kind mental health research effort with government, academia and the private sector working together to uncover the root causes of mental health conditions and to find 'actional' information that can reduce risk and build resilience in individuals, families and communities.

The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center is the lead research site for the study, but we know it will take the bright minds of many to address the mental health crisis in our state and beyond. The SOAR study is a true statewide effort, supported by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, with partners and impact across all 88 counties. In fact, over half of SOAR funding goes to activities outside of Columbus and Franklin County and there is a growing collaboration with Ohio's other public universities, health care institutions, and community organizations.

We've launched SOAR with two interrelated studies that run concurrently.

The Wellness Discovery Survey is a statewide representative survey of Ohioan's mental health—including suicidality, substance use, persistent distress, as well as biopsychosocial factors that may underlie risk and resilience. We've exceeded our participation goal in just one year, and more than 15,000 Ohioans have taken part, including representation from all 88 counties and across demographic indicators.

The Brain Health Study will assess brain and body health mechanisms of risk and resilience by deploying cutting-edge deep phenotyping technologies. More than 2,000 Ohioans have enrolled in the Brain Health Study which started this past summer, representing 1,280 distinct families.

The studies produced by SOAR will be multigenerational and help us identify the biological, psychological and social patterns of not only why and how some Ohioans struggle with mental health problems but also why and how others do not despite having the same adversities and challenges. The invaluable information we'll take from SOAR will allow us to find ways to protect people from persistent and harmful distress. It will also improve the lives of generations to come.

The next phase of SOAR will focus on sustaining the existing cohort of study participants. The longitudinal nature of SOAR is foundational to its vision and promise. Sustaining and building on the cohort will include repeat brain health assessments and follow-up wellness discovery surveys to track participants as their lives progress and their mental health changes over time. The SOAR team will also further work to identify modifiable risk and resilience factors and track those changes.

Along with my written testimony, you also have a copy of the SOAR interim report, which was produced in October 2024. It outlines early and promising discoveries that will contribute to shaping mental health and resilience for the future. Our next report is due to be released later this month, and we will share that with you as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I'm happy to answer any questions.