

**Senate Medicaid Committee
Opponent Testimony to HB 96
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March 15, 2025**

Chair Romanchuk, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Liston, and honorable Members of the Senate Medicaid Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of the National Association of Social Workers – Ohio Chapter (NASW-OH).

We are deeply concerned about the proposed cuts and threats to the Medicaid system in this budget. One of our biggest concerns is the proposed Medicaid expansion trigger language that would eliminate the program if the federal funding drops below 90%. Because of the Medicaid expansion program, we have seen a 50% drop in Ohio's uninsured rate between 2010 and 2022. This is great because a healthy population is a happy population, and a happy population is a working population. This is shown in the fact that 94% of Group 8 participants are working, in school, caring for family or managing serious physical/mental health conditions. By helping support this group of people, the state has been able to lift up and mobilize individuals who would not have health insurance without the program. This allows them to be fully functioning members of society who do not have to consistently worry about what would happen if they were to get sick or need to visit the emergency room. On top of this, the state would be taking huge steps backward in the progress you all have worked so hard to achieve in the mental health and addiction services system. Of the 770,000 Ohioans in Group 8, 630,000 have received mental health or substance use disorder (SUD) treatment. Ohio was hit hard by the opioid crisis, and having Medicaid expansion in place without a doubt helped save countless lives. Removing the program now puts us back in the danger zone.

On top of the concerns we have for the clients our members serve, we are also concerned about the impact this will have on behavioral health practitioners. Many agencies have expanded entire departments and increased their service offerings as a result of Medicaid expansion, which has enabled them to hire additional staff and meet growing community needs. Yet despite all this, we are still in a mental healthcare worker shortage. Removing Medicaid expansion would be disastrous for the state and do nothing but exacerbate the shortage. Instead, we should look at ways to strengthen our health care system to ensure that the state is healthy and will thrive for years to come.

Not only is this proposed language harmful to nearly 800,000 Ohioans and the mental healthcare workers fighting against the shortage, but it is also extremely short-sighted. While we understand the state could not afford to fund Group 8 if the federal funding were removed entirely, surely the state



could make up the difference if the funding level dropped by 1%. Thus, having this automatic removal language does not make sense. This body would only be hindering its ability to make decisions in the future when more information is available. We are deciding to throw away milk before opening the bottle to smell it. The best course of action would surely be to change the trigger language to say “may” instead of “shall.” This would allow the decision makers to evaluate the landscape if funding drops and decide the best course of action.

Please remove these harmful provisions from the budget so the mental health workers of Ohio can continue to provide the best care possible. Thank you again for allowing me to testify today, and I would be more than happy to answer any questions the committee may have.

