 

**Testimony by**

**Terry Russell, Executive Director**

**National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio**

**and**

**Ohio Federation for Children’s Mental Health**

**Sub. H.B. 64, the FY ’16 – ’17 Biennial Budget**

**Senate Finance Committee**

**June 11, 2015**

Chairman Oelslager and members of the Finance Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on Sub. H.B. 64. My name is Terry Russell and I am the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Ohio. Also, as a result of a management agreement in 2013, I serve as the Executive Director of the Ohio Federation for Children’s Mental Health. Combined, these organizations serve as Ohio’s voice on mental illness for individuals and families across the lifespan.

I am here today to urge you to restore the $30 million per year in the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services budget for critical mental health and addiction services.

Last year, the General Assembly made a $20.1 million investment in much needed high cost, low utilization crisis and housing programs for individuals struggling with mental illness and addiction disorders.   You recognized then that Ohio lacked the types of programs that individuals with untreated mental illness need most. I am here to tell you that the problems that existed one year ago have not gone away and neither should the money to address them. Many of the regional programs that were created with these funds have been up and running for less than six months. Many of these programs show enormous potential for improving access to critical crisis and housing services, especially in underserved areas of the state. However, the need out there is tremendous and we have only just begun to scratch the surface in terms of meeting the needs of some of our most ill individuals. *Please* do not withdraw funding at this critical juncture.

The remaining $9.9 million would replace funds at the local level that are being diverted to address the continuum of care requirements contained in the mid biennial review for individuals addicted to opiates.  While there is no question that drastic steps are needed to respond to the opiate epidemic, we cannot do it at the expense of individuals experiencing mental health crises.   We cannot rob from Peter to pay Paul.

Please, on behalf of over 500,000 Ohioans living with Serious Mental Illness, restore the $30 million per year to the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.