



## Ohio House Finance Committee

**Testimony of:  
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Chief Executive Officer  
Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities  
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Chairman Smith, Vice-Chair Ryan, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the Finance Committee, good morning.

My name is Cheri Walter and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities. We represent Ohio's local Alcohol, Drug Addiction, and Mental Health Boards. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

As you well know, today's community mental health and addiction system is striving to meet the growing demand for treatment for mental illness and addiction. However, the demand has outpaced the supply. Ohio's hospitals, jails, prisons, schools, businesses, and other human service settings are experiencing the strain of an overburdened treatment and recovery system. Every sector of society is impacted by mental illness and addiction, and an increasing number of individuals and families are coming forward requesting help.

As an individual in recovery from addiction and the daughter of an individual who battled addiction throughout her life, who has spent the last 35 years both personally and professionally working to address addiction and help individuals in need, I know the human toll of addiction on individuals, families, and communities. I also know that it's going to take a tremendous effort to stem the tide of this particular epidemic. Lastly, I know that we have to offer all of the families and individuals impacted by this epidemic HOPE. We need to talk about addiction as a chronic disease of the brain, and make sure that people know and understand that treatment works, and that people do recover!

What you have done with the investments in this budget and your focus on addressing Ohio's opiate epidemic is a tremendous step forward. I stand before you today and I applaud your commitment to helping every community throughout Ohio address this epidemic. By working together at the state and local level to prioritize and marshal all available resources and leverage all relationships we can end this epidemic in Ohio.

We know that with appropriate treatment and support, people can and do recover. As demand continues to surge, communities must ensure the existence of a full scope of care within the local Recovery-Oriented System of Care, including access to crisis stabilization services, as well as withdrawal management services. The targeted investments made in this budget package will help

communities who are struggling to meet the needs of their citizens provide additional access to services, thereby increasing the number of Ohioans who are able achieve and maintain recovery in their communities.

We truly appreciate your focus on the opiate epidemic and your holistic view of the importance of prevention, treatment, recovery supports. And while these investments are critical, I recognize that it may have been easy for you to stop there so I also want to acknowledge you for your commitment to mental health services and your investment in necessary services and supports for individuals and families impacted by mental illness. Your recognition of the co-occurrence of these conditions is evident.

I've included at the end of my testimony two small language recommendations that we are proposing. The first change would help us expand access to the acute substance use disorder and mental health crisis stabilization centers to ensure that these centers can most effectively meet the needs of their communities. The second would ensure that individuals receiving mental health treatment services are also eligible to continue their Medicaid coverage through the expansion.

We know that time is of the essence for the Mental Health and SUD Crisis Stabilization Centers. We can't afford to spend years building facilities and developing programs. The structure that we propose for these centers recognizes the immediacy of the needs. The Boards are already working to identify existing locations that could be quickly modified to meet the needs of these centers. We truly appreciate your support of these activities and we believe that these centers will increase access to critical levels of care throughout Ohio.

As I conclude my comments, I want to thank you again for your commitment to these issues and your focus on helping Ohioans with mental illness and addiction. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

### **OACBHA Recommended Language Edits**

*Between Line 130083 and 130084 insert -*

(3) It admits individuals who have been identified as needing acute substance use disorder stabilization or mental health crisis stabilization services.

*In line 84571 add reference to mental health treatment -*

“(D) Be participating in an alcohol and drug addiction or mental health treatment program.”