

HB 49 - Ohio State Biennial Budget
Regina Hillman Testimony
Ohio Senate Finance Committee

Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, my name is Regina Hillman, and I am here today to urge you to keep the Medicaid expansion in Ohio.

I have been married and divorced, and I'm now retired. For the last 19 years, I have also been the sole care taker of my son who lives with a serious mental illness. My son has schizoaffective disorder and other unspecified mental illnesses. He also has a traumatic brain injury. As our family's only support for him, it has been hard financially and emotionally. I have been the only source of support for him and his illness. He isolated himself in the house, withdrawn from everyone, confused and distressed, twenty four hours and seven days a week. The symptoms of his illness were exhausting to support by myself. In addition to struggling on my own to support him, I wondered for years - if my son gets some kind of other serious illness, how would I cope? He had no insurance!

After talking with my friends at the National Alliance on Mental Illness, I found out about the expanded Medicaid coverage in Ohio. Because of this program, my son gained access to Medicaid last year. For the first time in all of the years of supporting my son, Medicaid is opening doors for treatments that he could not access before. He is now on medication, and is receiving counselling and intensive supports for his mental illness. These are things I have tried to get for him for the last 19 years. It is like a light at the end of the tunnel. I know now that if something happens to me, he has other supports in place to help him live a decent life.

If the Medicaid coverage that helps him now is taken away, we will lose all the progress we have made. I really don't know what we will do. I know firsthand the value that this program has in the life of my son and my family. I urge you, members of the Ohio General Assembly, to maintain the Medicaid expansion in this state budget. My son is just like hundreds of thousands of Ohioans with a mental illness that have been helped by this new access to mental health treatment through expanded Medicaid. In fact, I am joined today by a group of folks representing the thousands of Ohioans with mental illness who hope that you will preserve their coverage through the Medicaid Expansion.

If the Chair would allow, I would like, through the chair, to present the committee with a simple reminder of our plea at this time.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify on HB 49 about the importance of the Medicaid expansion in our lives. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.