



**County
Commissioners
Association of Ohio**

Serving Ohio Counties Since 1880

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To: Members of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee
From: Tom Whiston - Morrow County Commissioner
Re: Substitute HB 49 - State Biennial Budget

Good morning Chairman Oelslager, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Skindell, and members of the Senate Finance Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Tom Whiston and I currently serve as a Morrow County Commissioner and Secretary of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO).

I'd like to talk to you today about two important county systems that are being affected by the opiate epidemic and provisions in HB 49 that will help bolster these systems.

The first is child protection. Opiate addiction has pushed the child protective system into a state of crisis and counties desperately need more resources in order to care for the children who are coming into our care.

Counties have seen a 20% jump in placement costs since 2010 with no new investment from the state. The children who are entering our care have experienced a higher level of trauma, leading to more intensive needs and longer placements. Finally, opiate cases also tend to be extremely traumatic for our child protective caseworkers and we are now facing a workforce shortage due to higher than normal turnover, placing even more pressure on this system.

The House appropriated \$15 million per year in their budget for children services agencies. CCAO supports that appropriation and asks that the Senate add an additional investment of \$15 million per year to total \$30 million in new child protection dollars. This investment would return us to pre-recession funding levels with a little extra to help manage the increased costs caused by the opiate epidemic. The flexibility of these dollars will help us recruit and support kin, foster care and adoptive families, address the rising costs of child placement and retain our most valuable asset – our case workers who are on the front lines everyday protecting Ohio's children.

The other system that is being affected is the county jails. The continued incarceration of mentally ill and addicted individuals in our jails places an undue burden of risk and cost upon these facilities and is clearly outside the purpose for county jails. Jail employees are not trained to manage or treat individuals suffering from mental illness or addiction, and this population is at high risk for injuring themselves and others.



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Three programs have been outlined by CCAO, the Buckeye State Sheriffs Association and the behavioral health community that would assist county jails in managing and caring for the mentally ill and addicted population. Two of these programs were included in the House passed version of HB 49:

- \$12 million to ADAMH Boards to help provide direct treatment and counseling services in the county jail through a program managed by the local county behavioral health boards. This program will provide a continuity of care for mental health and addiction services that are so critical for many of the individuals incarcerated in our jails.
- \$15 million to establish a state-wide behavioral health triage program that establishes regional centers which will provide beds for crisis intervention, conduct immediate forensic evaluations and manage detoxification.
- The third program, which was not funded, would provide reimbursement to counties for the psychotropic drugs prescribed for jail inmates. These drugs are an extremely costly part of the healthcare for these inmates and many counties are not able to maintain continuity in the formularies that are prescribed. The cost of this would be approximately \$4 million.

We support the funding that the House provided in HB 49 for these programs and request an additional \$4 million for psychotropic drugs.

As you heard from my colleague, Commissioner Ehemann, county budget pressures will now be exacerbated further by the loss of revenue from the Medicaid MCO sales tax.

As you discuss the priorities for Ohio's 2018/2019 operating budget, CCAO believes it is essential for the General Assembly to address these issues in order to preserve, protect and strengthen our important partnership – a partnership which contributes to Ohio's quality of life and overall success of our citizens. I thank you for your time today and I would be happy to answer any questions.