



NAMI Ohio Testimony: HB 354
Ohio House Finance Committee
October 9, 2019

Chairman, Oelslager, Vice Chair Scherer, Ranking Minority Member Cera, and Members of the Ohio House Finance Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today ON HB 354. My name is Terry Russell and I am the Executive Director of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Ohio.

NAMI Ohio is the state's voice on mental illness. The mission of NAMI Ohio is "to improve the quality of life, ensure dignity and respect for persons with serious mental illness, and to support their families."

NAMI Ohio's membership is comprised of thousands of family members, and people living with serious mental illness. We collaborate with our members as well as advocates and professionals to ensure that Ohioans with mental illness and their loved ones receive the treatment and support they need. NAMI Ohio and our 40 local affiliates provide an array of free programs to communities throughout Ohio to support consumers and families and to eliminate the stigma of mental illness.

NAMI Ohio appreciates the efforts of State Representatives Plummer & Swearingen to address the behavioral health needs of Ohio's citizens by ensuring that they receive mental health and addiction treatment in a prompt manner, even if it must be done on an involuntary basis. We want to thank these representatives for their good faith efforts to address Ohio's struggling mental health and addiction systems.

In addition we would also like to thank Governor Mike DeWine and the Ohio House and Senate for making significant strides in the recent state budget to shore up the continuum of care in the behavioral health system. Investments made in HB 166 will go a long way towards addressing access and capacity problems that have plagued the mental health system since the beginning of the deinstitutionalization movement and passage of the Mental Health Act of 1988.

During that time, Ohioans were promised that those persons with serious mental illness, who resided at state funded and run psychiatric hospitals, would have access to a robust system of community mental health care to replace the services they received in our state psychiatric hospitals. Unfortunately, despite some notable and appreciated efforts to address this issue, Ohio has never actualized and fulfilled that promise to its citizens.

HB 354 and other legislative efforts that address civil commitment statutes are an important part of a larger picture that we, as families and people with mental illness, must bring in to focus. Unless our state provides the adequate funding and resources to shore up the continuum of care for our mental health and addiction service system, we cannot be successful in these efforts.



Ohio must continue to build on the significant and needed investments in the behavioral health system that were made in HB 166. We must work together to continue to address gaps in our system by focusing by moving forward with investments in secure, non-hospital level residential facilities on every state psychiatric hospital campus, step-down mental health rehabilitation facilities, and wrap around service coupled with group and permanent supportive housing for people with the most severe mental health conditions to function in their communities.

Without such resources, our efforts to improve aspects of the civil commitment statutes and procedures will not be successful in fulfilling our promise to create a community mental health system that is responsive to the needs of our citizens. We must continue to build on the unprecedented victories given to us by Ohio's Governor and General Assembly in HB 166 to shore up the mental health system in our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on HB 354 and the Ohio General Assembly's work to address the needs of people with mental health and substance used disorders in our state. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.