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OhioGuidestone
Testimony before Health and Human Services Finance Subcommittee
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Good Morning Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West, and Members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. My name is Benjamin Kearney, and I serve as the Chief Clinical Officer and Executive Vice President of OhioGuidestone in Berea, OH. OhioGuidestone is the premier behavioral health agency in Ohio providing services and evidence-based treatments to children and families for over 150 years. OhioGuidestone has grown from its inception as a home for Civil War orphans to its current continuum of services, including out-of-home programs, early childhood mental health and education programs, parenting services, mental health services, employment programs, family counseling programs and juvenile justice services. OhioGuidestone actively serves more than 40,000 residents throughout the State of Ohio and community outreach and prevention programs have impacted over 140,000 Ohioans.

OhioGuidestone is seeking an earmark of \$325,000 for an Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Pilot Project. This appropriations earmark request aims to provide relief for children and families in Northeast and Central Ohio suffering from traumatic stress, and the impact of traumatic stress on maternal health outcomes. The request seeks to dedicate FY22-23 funds under Ohio's Continuum of Care or Community Innovations program to improve care for children and women following Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), defined as stressful or traumatic events experienced before age 18, and to demonstrate a co-located, integrated care model that could be incorporated into standard screening services covered by private insurance and managed care.

If approved, the pilot project would serve patients in several counties including Tuscarawas, Stark, Carroll, Erie, Summit, Cuyahoga, Medina, Franklin and Fairfield. OhioGuidestone is positioned to partner with the following clinical care providers;

- New Philadelphia City Health Department (Tuscarawas)
- Akron Children's Outpatient Clinic (Tuscarawas and Stark)
- Carroll, Tuscarawas, Erie, Fairfield, Medina and Summit County Health Departments
- MetroHealth (Cuyahoga)
- Lower Lights Christian FQHC (Franklin)

This request and the corresponding pilot project addresses ACEs, including physical, emotional and sexual abuse; physical and emotional neglect; mental illness; incarcerated family members; violence in the home; substance abuse; and divorce. Additional ACE indicators include economic hardship, exposure to community violence, homelessness, bullying, and involvement in foster care.

A person who accumulates four or more ACEs during childhood is:

- 2.2 times more likely to have ischemic heart disease
- 2.4 times more likely to have a stroke
- 1.6 times more likely to have diabetes
- 12.2 times more likely to attempt suicide
- 10.3 times more likely to use injection drugs
- 7.4 times more likely to be an alcoholic

Ohio has a vested interest in addressing ACEs. A recent Health Policy Institute of Ohio brief (attached) estimated a \$10 billion annual impact to Ohio in healthcare costs alone. Early identification of children who have been exposed, and are at risk for accumulating additional ACEs, is essential in order to provide necessary prevention, treatment, and to better tailor health care measures based on an understanding of the child's odds of illness or disease. Promoting awareness to parents and health care providers around the impact of trauma on the developing brain can also help to reduce the likelihood for additional ACE exposure. Furthermore, identifying ACEs among pregnant and postnatal women, and providing treatment and support when necessary, can limit the residual impact of traumatic stress exposure on children and associated costs within the behavioral health and Medicaid systems.

This earmark is requested specifically to support the development and implementation of an ACEs screening and early treatment protocol through an integrated behavioral and physical health model designed to impact life-long health and wellness for young children and pregnant women at urban health clinics. The goal of the program is to increase the availability and accessibility of evidence-based treatment for childhood trauma.

OhioGuidestone seeks to train Northeast and Central Ohio health center staff on the impact of trauma on the developing brain and the importance of early detection and prevention, facilitating the identification of ACEs among those served, and offering immediate onsite assessment and intervention. By integrating ACEs screening and trauma-informed onsite services into primary care settings, the proposed program will reduce the stigma often associated with trauma exposure, establish collaborative partnerships with families and health care providers to prevent future exposure and intervene early to build protective factors and resilience among those impacted, ultimately improving health outcomes.

OhioGuidestone has laid the groundwork for creating an ACEs screening protocol by partnering with five of Cleveland's Northeast Ohio Neighborhood Health Services (NEON) centers to develop an innovative response to address high rates of trauma exposure among children. Beginning in 2016, OhioGuidestone worked collaboratively with NEON staff to implement an ACEs screening protocol which now occurs during all well-child care visits for children from birth through age 5. OhioGuidestone co-locates a therapist onsite at these locations to provide consultation and immediate brief intervention to children, creating opportunity for a warm-handoff between provider and therapist, and provide all necessary referrals for mental health treatment and other services and supports as needed.

In addition, OhioGuidestone has recently further expanded this initiative to the University Hospitals Rainbow Center for Women and Children, located in Midtown Cleveland, which includes ACEs screening and co-located services for young children, as well as pregnant and postpartum women.

OhioGuidestone's preliminary findings show that early intervention, treatment, and skills-building can avert the cascading issues of accumulating many ACEs. We expect children participating the treatment protocol will demonstrate decreased trauma symptoms and decreased total health problems and participants who engage in Maternal Depression therapy will demonstrate decreased symptoms of depression. As one of the only local non-profit providers offering both specialized early childhood mental health therapy and maternal depression treatment, OhioGuidestone has the capacity and flexibility to carry out this program.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your consideration of our request.