



**Testimony of J. Robert Fowler, Ph.D.
Vice Chair, ADAMHS Board of Cuyahoga County**

**Ohio Senate Finance Committee
May 13, 2021**

Chairman Dolan, Vice-Chair Gavarone, Ranking Minority Member Sykes, and esteemed members of the Senate Finance Committee, I would like to thank you for inviting me to provide testimony about Ohio House Bill 110.

My name is J. Robert Fowler and I currently serve as the Vice Chair of the Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board of Cuyahoga County. I am submitting this written and oral testimony on behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of the ADAMHS Board of Cuyahoga County as an interested party in the language changes of HB 110 related to Ohio Revised Code (ORC) 340.

Before I begin, I would like to express the ADAMHS Board's sincere appreciation for this committee's ongoing commitment to supporting Ohioans impacted by mental illness and substance use disorders. As the father of a son living with mental illness, I am proud to serve on the Board of Directors and use my voice to ensure that the work in our local behavioral health system truly benefits affected individuals and their families. That is why I must share my concerns related to proposed changes included in HB 110 that impact the number and way that Governing Board Members are appointed to local ADAMHS Boards, which is outlined in ORC 340.02. I will also speak in support of the proposed language changes related to Ensuring the Protection of Data in ORC 340.03.

ADAMH Board Governing Board Appointments

On April 28, 2021, the ADAMHS Board of Cuyahoga County passed Resolution 21-04-05 outlining its position on the substitute measure of HB 110 related to appointment of ADAMH Board members and calling for the proposed language to be removed from the bill. The language related to changing Board appointments originated from a legislator in one Board area, Erie and Ottawa Counties, and is not representative of the position of ADAMH Boards across the state, certainly not that of Cuyahoga County. This language could change the number of Board members as well as exclude categorical appointments in the Board structure.

The ADAMHS Board of Cuyahoga County, as well as other Boards throughout the State, are devoted to fair representation and citizen leadership on its Board of Directors and supports the language that is currently written in Section 340.02 of the Ohio Revised Code (ORC). Cuyahoga County's appointed volunteer Board Members serve a critical role in our local systems of care and ensure robust community representation from all areas of our diverse and populous county. I stand in support of the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities (OACBHA) and am opposed to language changes in the numbers of members appointed to local ADAMH Boards since it would adversely affect our ability to address the diverse makeup of our county.

The categorical appointments, as currently outlined in ORC 340.02, ensure representation of individuals with lived experience with mental illness and substance use disorders, family members, and professionals in the field who provide critical input to the Governing Board decisions made on behalf of local communities. These voices – my voice as a family member, for example – are vital to ensuring that Cuyahoga County residents' concerns are represented so that they receive the care they deserve and have access to high quality behavioral health providers. For this reason, I am also opposed to the removal of the categorical appointments in ORC 340.02(C).

The House-passed changes are not informed by the needs of communities throughout Ohio and would limit the community input provided as ADAMH Boards make decisions about the local systems of mental health and addiction services. At a time when we are seeing an increased demand for care, we should not be decreasing the community participation in how decisions are being made on behalf of taxpayers and the public. Since I am opposed to this language change, I am **recommending your support of amendment SC3075, which removes these changes from the budget bill.**

Ensuring Protection of Data

Next, I would like to ask you to please maintain the proposed changes in ORC 340.03 that are included in the House passed version of HB 110. These changes are designed to clarify language to ensure that local ADAMH Boards can:

- Promote partnership agreements with other government programs providing public benefits for the purpose of coordinating and improving the administration and management of programs and services.
- Align with federal law requiring ADAMH Boards to comply with the requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 ("HIPAA") as a HIPAA-covered health plan.

This amendment, as passed by the House, does NOT increase or expand the Board's role or authority nor does it grow government. This language simply sets the stage for local Boards to work with state and local partners on data-sharing opportunities. It does not put into place any new data collection requirements nor will it increase costs for local providers. The ability to access and share timely data is a key component in providing a holistic view of the services currently being provided and is key for the community to be able to identify and respond to service needs before they turn into a crisis. It is something we expect from our local providers.

The current data infrastructure in Ohio's behavioral health system is fragmented and does not show a clear picture of available services and supports throughout the state. Local Board's would be better position to plan for and respond to local needs with access to shared data from Medicaid and other state agencies.

Thank you again for hearing my testimony. It is a distinct honor to serve individuals and families who are affected by mental illness and substance use disorders. I hope you will consider my appeals as a family member and as a Cuyahoga County ADAMHS Board member.