



**Proponent Testimony on House Bill 122
Senate Health Committee
September 29, 2021**

Thank you, Chairman Huffman, Vice Chairman Antani, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Health Committee, for the opportunity to give proponent testimony on this very important House Bill 122. I also want to thank Representative Fraizer and Representative Holmes for sponsoring this bill.

I am Thomas Stuber and I present today as the President of the Ohio Alliance of Recovery Providers (OARP), an organization of 40 of the largest addiction treatment and prevention agencies throughout Ohio. OARP endorses this legislation and all efforts to ensure that treatment services can be delivered to those most in need during this opiate epidemic. I am also President of The LCADA Way, the largest behavioral health agency specializing in substance use disorder treatment and prevention in Lorain, Medina, and Erie counties.

The LCADA Way has been providing telehealth services since 2009. This tool had limited utilization based on many of the restrictions imposed under rule, primarily the requirement that the customer have face to face meetings prior to implementation. The obstacles that made telehealth a necessity were required before it could be utilized. The COVID-19 pandemic and the loosening of the restrictions have led to full utilization and significant learning about the true benefits of telehealth services. Engagement and access to care are critical beginnings to successful outcomes.

The LCADA Way has offered the following services via telehealth: medical including medication-assisted treatment; counseling including group, individual, and family therapy; psycho-education; and assessment.

Initial tracking has indicated the following:

- Services were able to continue at roughly the same level as prior to the pandemic, meaning customers were served and rehabilitation continued, ultimately saving lives.
- Intensive outpatient programs and group attendance both increased significantly. Average group attendance increased from 8.5 customers to 10.4 or a 23% increase. Again, this will result in better outcomes for our customers. They don't get better if they don't attend.
- Conversions from intake calls to completed assessments increased from 55% to above 80%. This is because the assessment can happen immediately at the time of the call. Assessments appear to be just as effective via phone as in-person. We are seeing nearly the same percentage being referred to each level of care as we were seeing with in-person assessments.
- Customer satisfaction with telehealth services was also very high:
 - "Services have been helpful"
 - 97% reported that they strongly agree or agree
 - "I am satisfied with my treatment"
 - 93% strongly agree or agree
 - 7% disagree
 - "Do you feel that you have received quality treatment"
 - 93.4% strongly agree or agree
 - "Would you prefer services were provided via telehealth"
 - 51% would prefer telehealth
 - 30% would prefer in person sessions
 - 12% would like both options
 - 7% no opinion
 - "Would you recommend continuing telehealth services"
 - 84% would recommend both telehealth and in-person options
- Customers report that telehealth has removed many of the obstacles that they had to navigate when there is only the in-person option, these include transportation, transportation costs, work schedules, and childcare.

- Counselors are also reporting benefits, these include the ability to watch everyone's facial expressions and posturing directly on screen rather than trying to scan a whole room. They are reporting the development of the therapeutic relationship occurring quicker due to more frequent contacts with the customer, and an increase in family sessions due to being able to engage multiple family members who may not have participated before. The counselors also report that customers are participating more (they believe this may be the result of being in a safe, comfortable environment).

The pandemic has taught us two things:

1. Telehealth can effectively engage those who otherwise would not be able to receive care;
2. Telehealth is an effective mode of providing treatment and results in the same outcomes as persons receiving face-to-face care (for a large portion of our customer population).

It is critical that we embrace these lessons going forward and build them into our practices so that we can continue to reach those in need and provide lifesaving services. The opiate epidemic is still raging with overdose deaths in Ohio expected to increase by more than 28% this year, and the field is experiencing a crippling workforce shortage to address this surge in demand. Telehealth, as practiced with the federal public health emergency waivers, will need to be available to us to address these issues.

Thank you for the opportunity to present. I welcome any questions.

Thomas Stuber
President