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Theresa Gavarone
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Chairman Cirino and Members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for affording me the time to give sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 60, critical legislation that will utilize the expertise of Ohio's higher education institutions to address the workforce shortage that is currently contributing to the mental health crisis in our state.

According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, between 2016 and 2030, Ohio is projected to lose over 300 psychiatrists. This will leave the state with just 1,060 psychiatrists—52% of the number needed.¹ Quite simply, we are at a critical point where the demand for mental healthcare services vastly outpaces the current and projected workforce. To further put this into perspective, Ohio has 135 mental health professional shortage areas, making us 15th worst in the nation (NEOMED).²

This legislation to address the mental health workforce shortage would create a new licensed healthcare professional called a Certified Mental Health Assistant (CMHA). This program, spearheaded by one of the finest institutions of higher education in the state, the Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED), offers prospective students a pathway to specialize in mental health. The CMHA is similar to a Physician Assistant (PA) in scope of job responsibilities, education requirements, and clinical training but offers students the opportunity to specialize solely in mental health and substance abuse disorders.

CMHAs will work under the supervision of a physician, with whom they will meet weekly or more frequently, if needed, to discuss the care that they are providing. It is important to note that CMHAs will have some limitations in the way they practice. For example, their prescribing authority will be limited and only physicians will be able to make a diagnosis.

Mr. Chairman, in my time in the legislature I have either directly worked on or supported efforts to address the mental healthcare crisis in this state. Many times, I have heard about the struggles Ohio and other states across the country have had in creating and maintaining an adequate mental healthcare workforce. Working as an extension of a physician, this first-of-its-kind CMHA program is our latest effort to address the ongoing mental health crisis and workforce shortage.

Chairman Cirino, thank you again for allowing me to give sponsor testimony on Senate Bill 60 today.

I am happy to answer any questions members of the committee may have at this time.

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1. Health Resource and Services Administration, "State-Level Projections of supply and Demand for Behavioral Health Occupations: 2016-2030", September 2018.
 2. Northeast Ohio Medical University, "Certified Mental health Assistant: Physician Extender to address Workforce".