Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Health Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding HB 443 with my joint sponsor, Representative Plummer.

HB 443, or the Ohio Mental Health Parity Act and Addiction Equity Act, is simple in its intent: it updates and aligns Ohio law to be consistent with the federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equality Act (MHPAEA), which was signed into law federally in 2008. Unfortunately, Ohio’s outdated state statute regarding coverage parity - enacted in 2006 - does not align with the federal law and creates confusion for providers and patients and opportunities for non-compliance. This policy gap results in a lack of mental health insurance coverage by insurers in Ohio and an ’F’ rating by the Kennedy-Satcher Center for Mental Health Equity. Recent data also suggest that Ohio insurers may not be covering mental health to the levels required by federal law—contracting with fewer providers and paying them relatively less.[[1]](#footnote-1) This can delay critical treatment for patients, cause higher out-of-pocket costs as patients are forced to go out-of-network, and create confusion when providers seek reimbursement for behavioral health services. At a time when our state is facing unprecedented levels of substance and alcohol addiction and mental health disorders, strong state parity laws are foundational to robust parity enforcement, transparency, and accountability so that Ohioans can get the timely and effective treatment they need to recover and resume productive lives.

Specifically, this bill will update Ohio’s statute to align with the federal parity law and explicitly require insurers (many of which are already complying with the federal law in other states) to provide coverage for mental illness equal to coverage provided for physical ailments. To be consistent with the federal MHPAEA, these updates to Ohio’s statute include provisions that:

* + Help to raise awareness of individuals, families and employers about their rights under the parity law and educate the public on health insurance resources generally;
* Facilitate greater implementation of the parity law, including consumer protections;
* Hold health insurance plans accountable by requiring them to demonstrate compliance with the parity law to the Department of Insurance;
* Require executive agencies, such as the Department of Medicaid, to perform parity oversight over Medicaid Managed Care Plans and publicly report findings; and
* Codify a number of best practices that promote expanded access to addiction treatment services for Ohioans

Importantly, the bill is consistent with Governor DeWine’s RecoveryOhio Task Force report (March 2019) recommendation to align state law with the federal Parity law.[[2]](#footnote-2) HB 443 is supported by the Ohio Parity at Ten Coalition, which is a broad and diverse group of advocacy and policy organizations such as the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Services Providers, Ohio Psychological Association, Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities, Ohio State Medical Association, NAMI Ohio, Ohio Community Corrections Association, and the Ohio Children’s Hospital Association.

Chairman Lipps, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify, and Representative Plummer and I are happy to answer any additional questions the Committee might have. Thank you.



**Members of the Ohio Parity at 10 Compliance Campaign**

1. Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Services Providers
2. Ohio Psychological Association
3. Ohio Psychiatric Physicians Association
4. Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities
5. Ohio Citizen Advocates for Addiction Recovery
6. Ohio Hospital Association
7. Ohio State Medical Association
8. Ohio Counseling Association
9. Ohio Poverty Law Center
10. Ohio Association of Community Health Centers
11. Ohio Children’s Alliance
12. NAMI Ohio
13. National Association of Social Workers-Ohio Chapter
14. Prevention Action Alliance
15. Public Children Services Association of Ohio
16. Treatment Advocacy Center
17. UHCAN – Ohio
18. Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
19. Ohio Autism Insurance Coalition



**Members of the Ohio Parity at 10 Compliance Campaign (Continued)**

1. Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition
2. American College of Emergency Physicians, Ohio Chapter
3. Ohio Alliance of Recovery Providers
4. Ohio Community Corrections Association
5. Ohio Children’s Hospital Association
1. Milliman Research Report (November 2019): http://assets.milliman.com/ektron/Addiction\_and\_mental\_health\_vs\_physical\_health\_Widening\_disparities\_in\_network\_use\_and\_provider\_reimbursement.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. RecoveryOhio Advisory Council’s Initial Report (March 2019): <https://governor.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/243a2827-052c-40e0-8b4f-fbd638add11a/RecoveryOhio_062019.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)