

**Teresa Lampl – Written Testimony in Support of HB 443  
House Health Committee  
November 10, 2020**

Chairman Lipps, Ranking Member Boyd and members of the House Health Committee, my name is Teresa Lampl, and I am the CEO of the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Services Providers (The Ohio Council). I submit this testimony on behalf of the Ohio Council as well as the Ohio Parity Coalition – a diverse and experienced group of 27 statewide advocacy organizations. The Ohio Parity Coalition works to raise awareness and encourage greater enforcement of the Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA). The Coalition’s goal is to eliminate discriminatory barriers to mental health and substance use disorder care in the private and public insurance markets and ensure consumers have access to the behavioral health care services they are entitled to receive.

President George W. Bush signed the MHPAEA over twelve (12) years ago to end discrimination in insurance coverage of mental health and substance use disorder (MH/SUD) benefits – recognizing that illnesses of the brain, such as depression and addiction, should be treated viewed and treated similarly as illnesses of the body, such as diabetes and cancer. Unfortunately, the law’s implementation has been slow and enforcement weak. Indeed, the best available data shows that there is a problem in Ohio with insurers authorizing and paying for people to access mental health and addiction treatment services.

According to a November 2019 Milliman report: [Addiction and Mental Health vs. Physical Health: Widening disparities in network use and provider reimbursement](#), it is clear that despite efforts to enforce mental health parity, the lack of timely and affordable access to treatment is not getting better. The Milliman research report, which analyzed private insurance claims data for 2016-2017, shows significant out-of-network and reimbursement rate disparities for mental health and addiction treatment services when compared to physical health care. Other report findings include:

- Children’s mental health office visits are 10 times more likely to be out-of-network than a primary care office visit.
- A patients’ use of inpatient and outpatient treatment facilities are over 500 percent more likely to face out-of-network charges for behavioral health care than physical care.
- Spending for behavioral health care by private insurance plans has not shifted, despite the dire need, and sits at just 2.4 percent of overall health care spending.

Ohio communities continue to fight the scourge of the opioid epidemic and surging mental health concerns, including suicide deaths. However, as you all know, we are also in the midst of a global health pandemic, which has unfortunately exacerbated our state’s mental health and addiction concerns. HB 443 is important because it will complement the General Assembly’s investment in Ohio’s mental health and addiction treatment system by encouraging greater awareness and enforcement of the federal Parity Act, thus helping Ohioans have access to the services they and/or their employer pay for and are seeking for their recovery.

## Align State Law with Federal MHPAEA

The federal Parity Act requires health plans that offer coverage of MH/SUD to ensure that those benefits are provided on par as those for medical conditions. Insurers cannot impose financial requirements or quantitative limitations for MH/SUD that are stricter than those imposed for other medical conditions. The Parity Act also explicitly prohibits insurers from using – whether in writing or in practice – any plan design features, known as non-quantitative treatment limitations (NQTLs), for MH/SUD that are not used for other medical conditions. Because much of Ohio’s legislative efforts on parity pre-date the federal law some of Ohio’s insurance standards need to be updated. HB 443 would make the necessary corrections to do just that and codify the federal protections in state law to reduce confusion and ensure that Ohioans have equal access to MH/SUD care.

## Demonstrate Compliance Through Analysis and Reporting

HB 443 will also help ensure that state-regulated health plans meet their legal obligation as required under the Parity Act. Federal law prohibits insurance plans from offering health plan products that do not comply with the Parity Act. 45 C.F.R. § 146.136(h). The State must also ensure that Medicaid managed care plans comply with the Parity Act and provide documentation of its compliance to the public. 42 C.F.R. § 438.920(b). Yet, under the current enforcement practices, neither state regulators nor consumers receive the plan information that is necessary to determine whether the plan satisfies federal requirements of the Parity Act. While plan documents provide basic information on a consumer’s numerical limits to MH/SUD care, such as deductibles and cost-sharing requirements or the amount of care, plans provide no information on the NQTLs that effectively determine whether an individual gets the prescribed care. In addition to the NQTLs such as different reimbursement rates for MH/SUD providers and different standards for approving and re-authorizing treatment, plans often impose additional barriers to care that include more stringent or too vague medical necessity criteria, provider credentialing and network adequacy requirements.

A compliance reporting system is the most effective means of enforcing the Parity Act. Insurance plans already possess all the information regarding their plan designs, and they have a legal obligation to conduct a comprehensive analysis to ensure that their plan standards comply with parity requirements before selling those plans. The current enforcement paradigm, however, lacks transparency and places the responsibility on consumers to file complaints with state agencies if they believe their plan is failing to comply. These complaints require consumers to assess whether their plan offers comparable MH/SUD benefits to other medical benefits. Without the information to make this comparison, they cannot file a meaningful complaint under the Parity Act. Furthermore, in the face of a health care crisis, most consumers are focused on pursuing necessary and life-saving health care for themselves or a loved one. They are not attending to their legal rights or looking for the number for the complaint line. HB 443 will level the playing field for regulators and consumers by requiring transparency and improve accountability. Insurance plans will report Parity Act compliance information for state regulators to make the results of those reports available to the public.

Ohio is not alone in pursuing Parity Act compliance reporting through the proposed process. In April 2018, the U.S. Department of Labor implemented Parity Act compliance reporting guidelines consistent with those proposed in HB 443 for issuers of ERISA covered group and self-funded plans. Thus, making it clear that health plans must conduct and provide a detailed analysis, including records documenting any NQTLs and how they are applied. Further, between 2018 and

2020, a host of states enacted legislation that requires annual reports of parity compliance for NQTLs and other Parity-related issues. By passing HB 443, Ohio would join these other states as a leader in parity enforcement:

- AZ: [SB 1523/HB 2764](#) (2020)
- CO: [HB 19-1269](#) (2019)
- CT: [HB 7125](#) (2019)
- DC: [B22-0597](#) (2018)
- DE: [SB 230](#) (2018)
- IL: [SB 1707](#) (2018)
- IN: [HB 1092](#) (2020)
- MD: [SB 334](#) (2020)
- NJ: [A 2031/S 1339](#) (2019)
- OK: [SB 1718](#) (2020)
- TN: [SB 2165](#) (2018)
- WV: [SB 291](#) (2020)

#### Codifying Best Practices for SUD Treatment

HB 443 would also take critical steps to codify best practices in the treatment of substance use disorders with evidence-based medications. When people with SUD are prepared to enter treatment, it is critical that they do not face unnecessary delays or undue financial burdens that could prevent them from accessing the services they need. Ohio is not alone in its goal of removing utilization management barriers to prescription medications for substance use disorder treatment to address the opioid epidemic. At least seventeen states have taken similar action as proposed in this bill such as: Arkansas, Delaware, Missouri, Montana, New York, Vermont, Colorado, and Illinois. Additionally, bipartisan companion bills have been introduced in Congress (H.R. 3165 / S. 1737) that are consistent with the provisions of HB 443.

#### Conclusion

Importantly, HB 443 takes needed action to implement Governor DeWine's RecoveryOhio Task Force report recommendation to align state law with the federal Parity law. HB 443 also seeks to implement several recommendations of [President Trump's Opioid Commission](#) regarding insurance reimbursement and enforcement of the MHPAEA. Led by former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, the Opioid Commission report encouraged the standard collection of parity compliance data and information from health insurance plans and requires that insurers demonstrate compliance in terms of how they design and apply their managed care practices. Tennessee was the first state to codify this common-sense approach in 2018 and other states have followed suit. I hope Ohio will be the next. Indeed, the Ohio General Assembly has made significant investments to enhance services for people with MH/SUD. As Ohioans face increased mental health and addiction issues due to the coronavirus pandemic, this legislation supports your investment by removing unfair barriers to care and works in concert with the goals of Governor DeWine to expand access to such services so that Ohioans can recover and resume productive lives.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to provide my written testimony in support of HB 443.



## **Members of the Ohio Parity Coalition**

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
20. Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition
21. American College of Emergency Physicians, Ohio Chapter
22. Ohio Alliance of Recovery Providers
23. Ohio Community Corrections Association
24. Ohio Children's Hospital Association
25. OCALI
26. Advocates for Ohio's Future
27. Mental Health America of Ohio