



March 14, 2023

Lighthouse Youth Services Proponent Testimony on HB 33

Chairwoman Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on House Bill 33, Governor DeWine's executive budget proposal for state fiscal years 2024-2025.

My name is Jodi Harding, and I am Vice President and Chief Operating Officer at Lighthouse Youth Services. I have worked in the non-profit sector in Ohio for over 25 years.

Based out of Cincinnati, Lighthouse provides a wide range of trauma-informed services to help young people and families heal and grow. Whether it's therapy, residential treatment, foster care, emergency shelter, or housing, every young person we work with receives personalized care and unconditional support to thrive. We have 310 employees that serve 4500 clients annually.

Like my colleagues, we are facing difficulties in recruiting and retaining workers, and especially licensed therapists and social workers to treat kids and families. Right now, our system incentivizes unlicensed direct care staff. A behavior support provider currently makes only one dollar less an hour than a licensed social worker who has their master's degree and has meet the qualifications required from their licensing board.

The pay is just not there for the qualified and certified providers we need. Raising Medicaid rates is a huge step in the right direction to correcting this and incentivizing credentialed staff to complete their degrees and work at our agencies.

The lack of available qualified staff in our sector is directly negatively impacting kids and families. Currently, our wait list for children needing behavior health services is 100.

During the pandemic, Lighthouse invested \$1.2 million of our own dollars in wages for our mental health care staff. We did this as an investment in retention of our social workers and clinicians, but also as a way to offset the increased

risks and costs incurred during this time that could not be mitigated by our Medicaid rates, which make up 25% of our revenue.

Thankfully we do have city, state, and federal funding sources that include a renewal process which allows us to request rate increases based on our need. Through some of these funding sources, we have been successful in getting increased rates to cover the increased costs we have been incurring for years.

- Example #1: Hamilton County Job and Family Services recently increased rates across the board by 10% with an additional incentive for caring for youth 11 or older (\$40 per day)
- Example #2: Our local ADAMH Board allocated additional funding with levy dollars to address rising costs of supplies and wages.

While we are not always successful in these negotiations, we do not even have the option with Medicaid to do this. In fact, our Medicaid funding is the only non-negotiable public funding stream. This makes the need for increased Medicaid rates in the budget that much more crucial.

The need has gotten so dire that our outpatient services program is projected to be at a \$500,000 deficit at year end. At that point, we will be forced to decide whether to continue with outpatient as a line of business because it is financially unsustainable. I sincerely hope we are able to continue.

We respectfully request that you protect the current 10% increased Medicaid rate adjustment for behavioral health providers and increase it to 20%. I know from my years of experience that this will save the state money in the long run and, most importantly, keep kids and families connected to the services they need.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Jodi Harding
Vice President and COO
Lighthouse Youth Services
jharding@lys.org