

Danielle Gray
House Finance, Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
Testimony on HB 33 (SFY 2024-25 Operating Budget)
March 15, 2023

Chair Carruthers, Ranking Member Liston, Representative Hoops, Representative McNally and Representative Schmidt,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony today.

My name is Danielle Gray and I serve as the Executive Director of Ohio Recovery Housing (ORH). We are a non-profit organization with the mission to increase access to high quality recovery housing options for Ohioans with substance use disorder.

Recovery housing is a critical component of the continuum of care for persons with substance use disorder. A recovery home is not defined by the people who live in the home, but the environment that is created. A recovery home provides a safe, supportive living environment where individuals in recovery from a substance use disorder can receive peer support, connection to services and supports in the community, and participate in resident driven recovery planning.

We know that recovery housing works. ORH has been collecting outcomes data on recovery housing from participating organizations since 2016. Looking at our most recent data collected in 2022, we found that:

- 88% of residents who are moving out of recovery housing indicate that they are connected to ongoing recovery support services to maintain long term recovery when they are leaving recovery housing, with nearly 75% connected to certified peer support.
 - 57% of residents had no income when they moved into recovery housing. At six months of living in recovery housing, only 23% of residents did not have an income.
 - Nearly 1 in 5 recovery residents reported having an income of \$25,000 or more after living in recovery housing for six months.
 - Over 50% of residents have over \$5,000 in debt when they move into recovery housing, compared to 42% of residents at move out. While this may not seem like a small decrease, considering the relatively low incomes of residents of recovery housing, it is impressive how many are able to use living in an affordable recovery home as an opportunity to pay off debt and prepare for the future.
 - After six months, 17% of residents achieved a high school diploma or equivalent, 5% achieved technical or vocational certification.
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These results indicate that recovery housing not only provides support for recovery, but also helps residents gain employment, increase their income, and build skills to sustain their wellness and recovery for their future.

Without access to recovery housing, people will be at risk of homelessness or returning to environments where they are surrounded by people, places and things that promote a life in active addiction, instead of being surrounded by people, places and things that support a life in long-term recovery. The demand for recovery housing is high and funding is limited. According to a recent survey performed by ORH during August and September of 2022, 67% of recovery housing operators reported that they did not have sufficient capacity to serve everyone who had requested services in the past year.

Recovery housing is not an eligible benefit under Medicaid or private insurance – therefore, recovery housing operators rely on public and private grants, resident rent payments, fundraising and other sources of financial support to ensure they have enough revenue to cover expenses and ensure that the housing is still affordable for the people who need it. The increased funding the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) budget provides for recovery housing will allow more individuals the opportunity to live in a quality recovery home.

Ohio Recovery Housing feels strongly that the quality of services matters. ORH provides a voluntary certification program that allows recovery housing programs to demonstrate that they meet nationally recognized standards for quality and support long term recovery. We also provide training, technical assistance and support to any operator or potential operator of recovery housing that is interested in operating recovery housing in accordance with the national quality standards. These standards require recovery homes to have effective administrative oversight, provide appropriate recovery supports, maintain a safe, clean, and home-like environment and be good neighbors in local communities. ORH has certified 120 organizations operating nearly 400 properties serving over 3,000 Ohioans at any given time.

ORH fully supports the proposed increase in funding for recovery housing in the OhioMHAS budget and the policy proposals that have prioritize the quality of recovery housing. These policy changes would create a registry of recovery homes, require certification for recovery residences, and establish a complaint process for recovery housing.

ORH believes that these policy changes are essential. While ORH operates a housing locator that helps Ohioans connect to homes that meet quality standards, it is optional, and many organizations choose not to be listed. There is simply no way for families, persons in recovery or others to know where recovery housing resources are. It is difficult for families to find housing without appropriate knowledge of where existing resources are, and it is difficult for communities to do appropriate planning, measure gaps and address them. ORH supports the creation of a public registry of recovery homes. We simply caution that exact address not be placed on the public facing directory to protect the privacy and safety of the residents in the recovery home. General information such as county or



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zip code could be used in place of exact addresses to allow individuals to connect with resources, but provide sufficient privacy for residents.

The focus on certification or national accreditation of recovery housing is also essential. In the past, there has been no certification or national accreditation requirement. Therefore, there are many recovery housing operators who choose not to invest in or understand expectations for quality standards. It only takes a couple low quality or bad actors in this space to it more difficult for quality operators to become established and gain critical community support. Additionally, there is currently no place for residents, family members or neighbors to go if they have a concern about recovery housing. The proposed OhioMHAS policy language would create such a process, so individuals have a place to go to bring concerns, ensure that they are reviewed and responded to appropriately. We support the creation of a concern review process, and support posting the results of substantiated concerns on the public registry so individuals, families and communities can be aware of concerns.

People in recovery deserve and need a quality living environment that provides them a home, a place to rediscover their purpose, a sense of community, and the ability to continue on their journey toward health. Our neighbors deserve to know high quality recovery housing services that are being offered by organizations that recognize the importance of being responsible neighbor and value being part of the community. I ask that you support the increased funding for recovery housing as well as the critical policy provisions in the OhioMHAS budget that would increase access and quality of recovery homes across Ohio.

Thank you again for your time and attention and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.