



**Workforce and Higher Education Committee
November 15, 2023
Proponent Testimony – S.B. 60
Ilene Shapiro, Summit County Executive**

Chair Cirino, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Member Ingram and members of the Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 60.

For years, Summit County, like much of Ohio, has grappled with an opioid epidemic and a mental health crisis. In coordination with our Department of Public Health and Summit County Alcohol, Drug, & Mental Health Board, and numerous community organizations, our County has dedicated countless hours and millions of dollars in resources to address these problems in our community. Despite these efforts, it is clear the need for mental health and addiction resources is greater than ever.

In Summit County, we are taking a holistic approach to treat addiction and mental health. This includes treating addiction like the disease that it is, coordinating social services through Unite Us, prioritizing trauma-informed care, and addressing the mental health needs of the residents in the County jail.

As we engage in this work, it is difficult to ignore the glaring issue that faces our community and so many across the state: the shortage of practicing psychiatrists. Throughout Ohio, data show we have only about one practicing psychiatrist for every 10,000 people. Based on data from NAMI Ohio, 43% of adults in Ohio reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, with 19% unable to get needed counseling or therapy.

In a time of unprecedented need in our communities, it is appropriate to pursue creative solutions that have the potential to shift the current status quo. The Certified Mental Health Assistant (CMHA) proposal is one of these solutions.

The proposal to add a Certified Mental Health Assistant certification would address the provider shortage affecting our communities. This proposal allows for CMHAs to work under physician supervision to treat patients with mental health conditions. This model would allow for a greater number of patients to be treated and help alleviate some of the stress from our overburdened mental health providers.

Summit County strongly supports the CMHA program proposed by Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED) and has committed funds towards standing up the new physician-extender training pathway program. At NEOMED, CMHA students will be trained in a variety of health care systems alongside medicine and pharmacy students and psychiatry residents ensuring an interdisciplinary approach to mental health care. It is my hope that after a successful pilot of this program by NEOMED, other universities in Ohio will launch similar programs to train CMHAs.

While the impact of this new licensure would not be felt for several years, this proposal is one of many innovative strategies that are needed to increase mental wellness and reduce rates of substance use disorder in Summit County and the entire state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ilene Shapiro". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ilene Shapiro, Executive
County of Summit