

July 18, 2019

Last night, the Ohio General Assembly voted to present the 2020/2021 State Biennial Operating Budget to Ohio Governor Mike DeWine. The Governor is set to sign the \$143.27 Billion State Biennial Budget this morning. Mental health advocates, family members, friends and people with mental illness have reason to celebrate!

Every single one of NAMI Ohio's budget priorities, including funding for crisis services, children's mental health, and housing were included in the final state budget bill.

Crisis Services, Prevention & Student Wellness Funding

In the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OMHAS) portion of the budget, the Ohio General Assembly approved **\$36M** in FY 2020 to support K-12 mental health prevention education initiatives and curricula. Senator Dolan, the Chairman of the Ohio Senate Finance Committee, specifically highlighted how the Conference Committee had decided to restore this funding in part to address suicide prevention.

In the area of Crisis Continuum of Care, the General Assembly approved \$37M total over the biennium to expand Crisis Response and downstream stabilization services for mental illness. Some of this money will be used to build crisis diversion centers, to fund mobile crisis teams, and create skilled rehabilitation facilities for those leaving a psychiatric hospital - so people have time to recover after a mental health crisis.

Governor DeWine's Student Wellness and Success fund, which will be used for mental health counseling, wraparound supports, mentoring, after school programs, and more - ended up being funded at a whopping \$675M over the biennium! This is despite our initial concerns that the Governor's original recommendation of \$550M would be cut by the Ohio General Assembly. This level of funding support is a once in a generation type of achievement for mental health advocates and stakeholders. The Governor, the Speaker of the Ohio House, the President of the Ohio Senate, and the entire Ohio General Assembly deserve a ton of credit for funding this vital priority for our State's children.

Multi-System Youth & Ending Custody Relinquishment

There are also other mental health-related items in the state budget - one sponsored by Gail Channing-Tenenbaum, the foremost children's advocate in the state, that provides **\$18M** in new funding that is flexible dollars in the Medicaid portion of the state budget to end custody relinquishment for multi-system youth. Advocates have fought for years to end the horrible practice of separating children from their parent's custody so that they can receive intensive treatment for a multitude of conditions, including mental illness. The funding and policies in this budget will finally address this issue in a significant way.



National Alliance on Mental Illness *The State's Voice on Mental Illness*

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Specialized Court Dockets and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) Training

The budget also added **\$5 M** to create at least 30 more Specialized Courts (including mental health courts) during the biennium. There is also another **\$5 M** to expand the number of individuals trained in mental health first aid and Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training for law enforcement officers to de-escalate situations involving persons in a mental health crisis.

Housing

Thanks to the efforts of Bill Faith, the Coalition on Housing and Homelessness in Ohio (COHHIO) and housing advocates across the state, this budget includes provisions that housing advocates expect to generate \$2.5 million a year for the Ohio Housing Trust Fund. This is the first increase in 16 years for the Ohio Housing Trust fund, and is desperately needed as homelessness in this state has risen 20% over the last 5 years.

Mental health advocates, family members, friends and people with mental illness have reason to celebrate! Now, everyone impacted by mental illness in Ohio can step back and pray that we are moving toward the day where our loved ones will be able to get the services needed to recover, despite where they live or their station in life.

There are many days when all of us question if what we are doing makes a difference. Today is not one of those days. Today is a day of celebration. I ask each of you to recognize that the comment, "You'll never walk alone" will be true if all mental health advocates voices are heard.

We want to thank our colleagues in the mental health advocacy community, as well as Governor DeWine and all members of the Ohio General Assembly for making mental health a priority.

God bless,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Terry L. Russell".

Terry L. Russell

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