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Testimony before the Senate Education Finance Subcommittee
Early Childhood – Ohio Department of Mental Health

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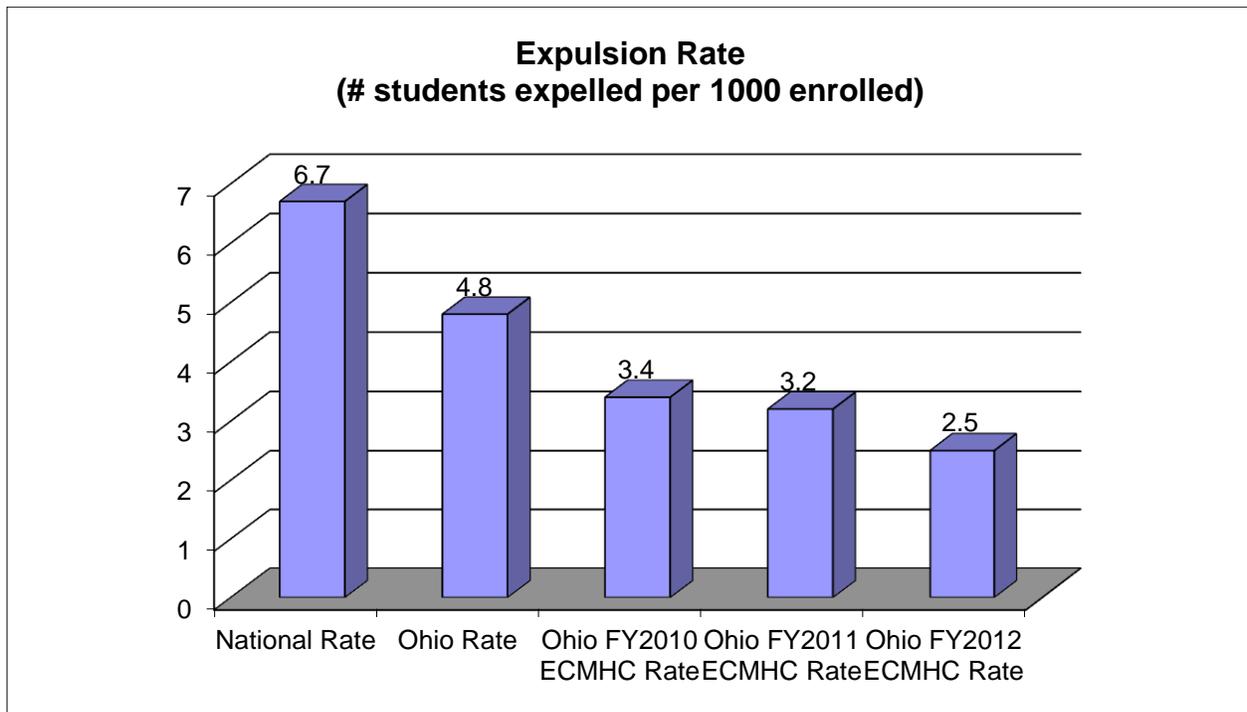
Good morning Chair Gardner, Vice Chair Lehner, Ranking Member Turner and members of the Education Finance Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you the efforts of the Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH) with regard to addressing the mental health challenges experienced by our youngest Ohioans. My name is Dr. Valerie Alloy and I lead ODMH's early childhood programming.

Many people are surprised to hear that young people can face mental health difficulties at ages as young as one-year or less. In fact, there are many reasons a child might need mental health treatment. As an example, even at a young age, a child can experience trauma, which affects their ability to learn and properly develop. Early childhood mental health is the developing capacity of the child from birth to 6 years of age to form close and secure adult and peer relationships; experience, manage, and express a full range of emotions; and explore the environment and learn. ODMH seeks to ensure that all children have a chance to experience proper growth on a socio-emotional level.

I have been with ODMH a few short months, but in that time, I have worked with stakeholders to develop a new vision for early childhood mental health.

The Ohio Department of Mental Health is committed to continued development and implementation of a comprehensive system of care which will create healthy, resilient young children (birth to age six). By partnering with families, strengthening caregivers and supporting providers with Innovation and Evidenced- Based Best Practices, Ohio will become point of excellence leading the nation in young children's social and emotional wellness.

Ohio is already ahead of the pack with regard to early childhood mental health, as I found out at a recent Race to the Top Conference in Washington, DC. Since 2000, ODMH has run an early childhood mental health consultation program to work in child care and Head Start settings to increase parents' and providers' competency in working with at-risk children to improve social and emotional development and prepare children to thrive in school. Studies on the efficacy of this programming show that Ohio's rate of expulsion of children from child care centers is well below the national average and has been on a steady decline in recent years. As you can see in the chart below, centers receiving consultation services have just 2.5 expulsions per 1,000 kids compared to a national average of 6.7.



As a result of this success, Ohio integrated mental health needs into its Race to the Top Early Learning grant better than any other state in the nation. Through the grant, ODMH has already begun service delivery by a team of 17 Early Childhood Mental Health Consultants statewide to early childhood centers, family child care centers and Early Head Start and Head Start programs. The primary activity at this time is identification of high need programs for which professional development and training will be provided in the areas of social and emotional health; impact of trauma in early childhood; managing challenging behaviors; improved cultural competency and stress management for caregivers. Working directly with educators, licensed child care centers, and certified home-based early child care providers, the consultants will make classroom observations, help assess children’s social and emotional adjustment and provide professional development training and feedback to educators and early child care professionals on classroom environment, strategies for managing challenging behaviors and make linkages to area mental health providers for children and families in need of more specific services and supports. Anticipated outcomes of the project include improved family engagement, reduced expulsion rates from early child care settings and early linkage and referral to behavioral health services to prevent escalation and worsening of possible emotional or behavioral symptoms.

Although Ohio is a high achiever in the area of early childhood mental health awareness and identification, it is my goal to be number one in the nation. In an effort to grow Ohio’s programming and seek out additional best practices and successful models, we recently

released a request for proposals for new, novel or innovative approaches in addressing the priority target populations of the RTT-ELC Challenge Grant: children birth to age 6 who are high needs, low income; multiple disabilities, or are English Language learners. Our goal is to identify programs with proven outcomes that can be replicated and sustained in other environments. Each approach will be demonstrated through digital media and will be made available through our state agency website.

It is an exciting time to be working in early childhood here in Ohio. There is a great amount of work ahead of us, but with interagency collaboration and teamwork with my fellow panelists, we are up to the task. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at the finish of our presentations.