

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid, my name is Walter Asbury and I thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on a concerning provision inserted into Ohio's budget bill, House Bill 166. This provision, Section 5123.603, creates an unnecessary and troubling joint legislative oversight committee designed to examine if Disability Rights Ohio should be replaced as the state's protection and advocacy system.

As the Chairperson of DRO's PAIMI advisory council and member of DRO's board of directors, this proposal is very disturbing to me. The PAIMI Advisory Council was created at the federal level to advise Disability Rights Ohio on issues important to people receiving mental health services in Ohio. PAIMI stands for Protection and Advocacy System for Individuals with Mental Illness. Nearly 20 people with lived experience or who are family members, serve on the PAIMI Council, where we examine DRO's priorities and give input on what work they do each year. We also submit a report to the federal regulators about the yearly activities of DRO's PAIMI work.

As a person in long term recovery from PTSD and Substance Use Disorder, I take my role as Chairperson very seriously. Addressing the rights and needs of people receiving treatment services are something that needs this serious attention, as I've lived through it and want to make sure organizations like DRO can do everything to make sure people are safe and provided their rights.

When I was elected to the leadership of the PAIMI Council last year, I had hoped that with newly elected government leadership that we might actually get to work on improving the lives of people with mental illness. I felt that the legislators of Ohio would be some of our strongest allies, as DRO had been a State of Ohio agency before 2012, you would understand the spoken mantra of "Nothing about us, without us" spoken often in these galleries by Pat Reiser, a longtime advocate for those minimized.

Instead, I now stand before you opposing a provision that intends to impede the justice that Disability Rights Ohio strives to provide to the citizens with mental health illnesses. I ask that this chamber remove this provision inserted in the House and not allow those that have power over our most vulnerable to sway this body to retaliate against this private nonprofit.

I feel the proposed changes are meant to reverse the intent of congress and federal courts, that if a few powerful voices do not like the orders of a court then they seek to use the legislature to change the underpinning foundation of those working to bring light to the injustice done to the most vulnerable.

Ohio's PAIMI Council diligently brings to DRO's attention the needs of the Mental Health and Addiction Recovery community and the staff listens and beyond listening, when needed they take action. They also provide resources to help people advocate for themselves.

Just a few issues the PAIMI council and DRO investigative staff has brought to light in the past year:

Juvenile Treatment:

Facilities that use restraints to replace appropriate treatment modalities – these were meant to teach communication skills and advances positive behaviors. DRO rooted out this abuse and continues to have to fight for asked documentation and discovery.

County Workshop Issues:

Underpaying the least able to have a choice in their employment.

State Psychiatric Hospitals:

Working to improve treatment activities on the weekends to help people recover.

There are all too many others to provide specifics but a listing is appropriate:

Issued a public report about ongoing issues at a private psychiatric facility

Conducted 167 investigations and monitoring of a wide variety of places where people with disabilities live like County Correctional Facilities; Assisted Living Homes; Children's homes

Worked on 204 cases of abuse and neglect

Helped 107 victims of crime with disabilities

I am asking the Senate to remove the language from this budget bill that would take away the voice of PAIMI Council, I am asking you to be courageous and not remain silent behind the anesthetizing security of this august body.

Thank You.