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ASSOCIATION
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June 13, 2025

The Honorable Michael J. Rodrigues
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Aaron M. Michlewitz
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Joanne M. Comerford
State House, Room 410
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Ann-Margaret Ferrante
State House, Room 238
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Patrick M. O'Connor
State House, Room 419
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Todd M. Smola
State House, Room 124
Boston, MA 02133

RE: FY26 Budget Conference Committee

Dear Chairs Rodrigues and Michlewitz, Vice Chairs Comerford and Ferrante, Senator O'Connor, and Representative Smola:

On behalf of the Association for Behavioral Health Care (ABH) and our members, thank you to both Chambers for putting forth thoughtful budgets and to each of you for your role in reconciling the two proposals. We recognize budgeting for this fiscal year presented additional challenges to an already difficult task and we appreciate your efforts. Below please find observations and requests for your consideration as you determine the conference committee report.

As context for our comments, ABH is a statewide association representing more than eighty community-based mental health and addiction treatment provider organizations. Our members are the primary providers of publicly funded behavioral healthcare services in the Commonwealth, serving approximately 81,000 Massachusetts residents daily, 1.5 million residents annually, and employing over 46,500 people. ABH and our members appreciate all efforts to support our mission, however, ABH policy opposes earmarks directed to specific providers in mental health and substance use treatment and recovery services accounts in state funding bills.

Line-item 5046-0000 Department of Mental Health (DMH) Adult Community Services

The disparity between the House and Senate on this line-item is of profound concern to ABH because of the potential for unintended consequences to community treatment services for adults with serious mental illness.

From the Senate budget, ABH strongly supports the funding level at \$693.8 million *and* the Senate inside language. Our understanding is that the Senate proposal will avoid cuts to essential adult community services. ABH supports the Senate proposal directing \$19 million for jail diversion programs and another \$19 million for DMH Emergency Room Diversion initiatives.

Our apprehension with the House proposal, which both reduces the line-item and mandates spending by requiring FY25 levels for certain services, such as case managers, is the inevitability that it would result in a devastating loss of adult community services such as Adult Community Clinical Services (ACCS), Respite Programs, Program of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT), and/or Clubhouse. This would include cuts to group living environments (residential programs), leaving adults with serious, persistent mental illness, homeless and without treatment. We can provide more detailed information about the many critical services and the extent that they would be at risk, if that would be helpful.

Line-item 5042-5000 Department of Mental Health (DMH) Children's Services

From the Senate budget, ABH respectfully requests including the Senate funding level and language that would fully maintain core children's services such as Clinically Intensive Residential Treatment (CIRT), the only such program in the state, Intensive Residential Treatment Programs (IRTP), and Flexible Support Services, including Emergency Department diversion and other critical services for children.

Line-item 5095-0015 Department of Mental Health (DMH) Inpatient Hospitals

From the Senate budget, ABH supports the Senate funding that includes \$5.5 million in this line-item that is necessary to maintain the CIRT and IRTP programs for children and adolescents.

Line-item 4000-0300 Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Administration

From the Senate budget, ABH supports including language that establishes a special commission to make recommendations for improving access to behavioral health services for children and families. Accessing critically needed behavioral healthcare has become increasingly difficult for children and families. A review of available services, barriers to access, and potential solutions by key-stakeholder and state agencies is long overdue.

From the House budget, ABH supports including language requiring EOHHS report monthly on the status of the implementation of the behavioral health roadmap. The Roadmap for Behavioral Health Reform, which aims to simplify access and entry to the state's outpatient behavioral healthcare system, is a complex set of policy initiatives. Regular reporting on implementation will help keep track of the progress, successes, and challenges of these dramatic changes to the delivery system.

Line-item 1599-6903 Chapter 257 Rate Reserve

Workforce continues to be the most pressing issue confronting ABH members. Thank you to both the House and Senate for funding the Chapter 257 Rate Reserve at \$207 million.

From the Senate budget, ABH supports including language requiring EOHHS report on the comparison of salaries paid to employees of state-operated human service providers and rates paid to human service provider employees in community-based human service organizations. Adequate wages for human services workers remain a consistent priority for ABH. While our goal is to establish salary benchmarks for job titles based on the 75th percentile of the applicable wage reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, our more immediate concern is to not have rates backslide due to level funding that does not account for inflation as well as tax and fringe calculations that do not account for retirement or terminal leave.

Line-item 4512-0200. Department of Public Health/Bureau of Substance Addiction Services (BSAS) Program and Operations.

ABH is an active member of the Massachusetts Coalition for Addiction Services (MCAS), a group of organizations that advocate to strengthen funding and support for harm reduction, prevention, treatment, and recovery support services with the goal of increasing access to services for people with substance use disorders and saving lives. The Coalition specifically advocates for investments in line-item 4512-0200.

Consistent with MCAS recommendations, ABH supports the following for inclusion in the final conference committee report.

From the House budget, ABH supports maintaining the funding level at \$195 million and the following programs:

- \$10 million for low threshold housing for homeless individuals with substance use and co-occurring disorders at risk of HIV.

From the Senate budget, ABH supports maintaining the following programs:

- \$1.5 million to expand and develop the state's licensed alcohol and drug counselor and recovery coach workforce as contemplated by Chapter 285 of the Acts of 2024.
- \$300,000 to increase and expand transportation programs for individuals seeking substance use treatment services to mitigate a significant barrier to care, particularly in rural communities.
- Spending to provide technical assistance and training to increase the number of providers and to support existing providers delivering culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse services in communities of color, which have been disproportionately impacted by the overdose epidemic.

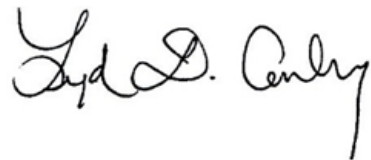
Senate Budget Outside Section 27

ABH strongly supports this Outside Section that would amend use of the Behavioral Health Access and Crisis Intervention Fund to support access to a continuum of care and to provide high-quality and equitable access to emergent, urgent, diversionary and rehabilitative care for individuals with a behavioral health condition. The flexibilities allowed by this language would benefit individuals seeking crisis behavioral health services across the Commonwealth.

We are always available to provide more information and elaborate on the importance of these initiatives.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Lydia Conley
President & CEO