May 3, 2021

Jeff Davis
Director of Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities
30 E. Broad Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Director Davis,

The Ohio Provider Resource Association would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued diligence as we navigate through the pandemic which has affected so many of our fellow Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). The work that the department and our fellow providers have performed during this unprecedented time has been nothing short of incredible. With that being said, OPRA would like to take this opportunity to offer a proposal regarding those individuals our providers serve who also struggle with mental illness.

As I’m sure you are aware, mental illness affects approximately 1/3 of the total population of individuals with I/DD. Often times, mental health issues are overlooked and overshadowed by a failure to recognize symptoms. These symptoms are sometimes attributed to the individual’s disability rather than a form of mental illness. Additionally, there is a common belief that people with I/DD often live in a therapeutic environment and therefore don’t require mental health services. Those who work with individuals with I/DD recognize that there is a great need for mental health services within our field. The current pandemic has highlighted the fact that one’s mental health is as important as one’s physical health and well-being.

At this time OPRA is proposing that a partnership be established between the Department of Developmental Disabilities and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. The goal of this partnership is for the two departments to work in cooperation with one another to provide for the appropriate treatment and services for individuals with I/DD and mental health issues. This partnership would establish support and training protocols for providers in order to keep individuals living in their current community based setting.

Over the past several years, and especially during the pandemic, we have seen an influx of people with I/DD whose mental health often supersedes their I/DD needs. Ohio’s I/DD system simply does not have the expertise or structures in place to provide adequate mental health treatment without outside support. This proposal would seek to end those barriers.

On behalf of OPRA, our membership, and the individuals with I/DD served, we appreciate the opportunity and consideration of this proposal.

Sincerely,