



**TESTIMONY ON
THE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COMMISSION ON
ADULT MENTAL HEALTH REPORT**

Presented to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee

By
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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), a non-profit, non-partisan association representing the commonwealth's 67 counties. We appreciate the opportunity to offer our remarks on the Behavioral Health Commission on Adult Mental Health findings and recommendations, including recommendations on how to allocate \$100 million in one-time funds for mental health.

As you know, Act 54 of 2022 as part of the FY 2022-2023 budget implementation created a new behavioral Health Commission for Adult Mental Health, which was tasked with exploring a list of mental health-related initiatives and services, including workforce development, the intersection of behavioral health and the criminal justice system and the impact of social determinants of health on behavioral health. From their findings, they were required to issue a report which was to include recommendations on how to allocate \$100 million in one-time federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds for adult mental health.

The recommendations include three main areas of focus for allocation of this \$100 million, including investments in workforce, criminal justice and public safety and expanded capacity. More specifically, the Commission called for \$37 million to stabilize, strengthen, and expand the behavioral health workforce, with \$5 million specifically set aside for county workforce needs; \$23.5 million to improve the criminal justice and public safety systems, with \$5 million specifically set aside for counties to develop or expand co-responder models; and \$39 million to expand capacity for services and supports, with \$8 million specifically set aside for counties to address social determinants of health, including supportive housing and older adult behavioral health needs. Finally, the Commission recommended the remaining \$500,000 be set aside to evaluate the impacts of these investments.

Alongside the funding recommendations, the report recognized that an increase in the county base funds in future state budgets remains critical as without guaranteed funds, counties will be cautious about adding services that cannot be sustained once the federal dollars have been spent. Counties appreciate the investment of these funds and recognize that these dollars can be invested to have a positive impact in the absence of increased General Fund support for county mental health, but strongly support the Commission's call for an increase in county base funds for the long-term stability of the system.

Counties strongly support the Commission's recommendations and stand ready to move quickly to get these funds invested where they matter – in our communities and the people of Pennsylvania. However, for the funding to have the maximum impact, the House, Senate and administration must work with counties to craft legislation that will effectively implement the recommendations in the Behavioral Health Commission's report by retaining flexibility for counties to address local needs.

Each county must have flexibility when deciding how to utilize its funding since no county is alike, and each has its own unique strengths and challenges. Because of this, counties strongly support the Commission's call for flexibility in utilizing mental health funds. Despite the lack of consistent funding, counties have been able to serve their constituents in the most effective manner possible due to the flexibility of the county mental health base funding.

With the funding recommended by the Commission, counties could begin making critical investments that would help shore up the behavioral health system in a holistic way. Counties currently administer direct services to support their community's mental health system. But counties have explained that if they were given an increase in mental health, they would be able to address specific needs concerning children's mental health and older adult's mental health, crisis intervention and capacity, peer supports and other diversion services. These are just a few ways counties have illustrated how they would utilize additional funding.

Lastly, counties support the Commission's recognition that an increase in the county base funds in future state budgets remains critical since, without guaranteed funds, counties will be cautious about adding services that cannot be sustained once the federal dollars have been spent. Counties' primary goal for this \$100 million investment is that these funds go to support adult mental health services in ways that will have a positive impact without creating ongoing unsustainable obligations. We reiterate the Commission's emphasis that while these dollars can positively impact the absence of increased General Fund support for county mental health, they are one-time funds and not a long-term solution.

To adequately address depression, anxiety, autism, substance abuse and a variety of other issues, we ask that the General Assembly support the Commission's recommendations in allowing counties flexibility in the use of mental health funds as well as the allocation of the \$100 million in federal funds.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer our testimony and for your consideration of these comments. We look forward to continuing to work with you on addressing the mental health crisis throughout the commonwealth.