

Dave Burke

State Senator

Ohio Senate District 26

614-466-8049

Sen26@ohiosenate.gov



Nickie J. Antonio

State Representative

Ohio House District 13

614-466-5921

Rep13@ohiohouse.gov

May 4, 2018

Governor John Kasich  
Riffe Center, 30<sup>th</sup> Floor  
77 South High St.  
Columbus, OH 43215-6117

Dear Governor Kasich,

We are writing to you today in regards to a behavioral health program that serves high-risk youth in Cuyahoga County, Positive Education Program (PEP) Connections. PEP Connections serves about 500 youth per day, over 800 annually, all of whom have intensive mental health needs and are at risk of out-of-home placement or are returning from in-depth treatment.

Since 1971, PEP Connections has been a vital part of the Cuyahoga County community. Their work keeps families intact and keeps children out of expensive out-of-home placements, such as psychiatric hospitals, detention homes, shelters and youth correctional centers. Most importantly, PEP Connections has changed the lives of so many families and their children in Cuyahoga County, and due to their intervention, 75 percent of the youth served by PEP Connections has shown a decreased severity of their clinical problems, and more than 71 percent showed improvement in their ability to function allowing them to live normal, healthy lives.

PEP Connections is a cost effective program for the State. The program reduces youth's involvement in an expensive county children's custody system by 57 percent and the juvenile justice system by 35 percent. As previously stated, PEP Connections keeps the youth they serve out of out-of-home placements. These placements can be very costly—for example, a residential mental health center can cost \$400 per day with an average nine-month stay of \$108,000. In stark contrast, PEP Connections costs \$7,060 per child per year.

PEP Connections is currently funded through Medicaid's 1915(a) waiver, which allows PEP Connections the flexibility to serve this unique community through an intensive program. The Departments of Medicaid and Mental Health and Addiction Services have announced that they will be terminating the 1915(a) waiver on June 30, 2018. The departments are doing this with the belief the integration of behavioral health into managed care on July 1, 2018 will continue to provide these critical services without break. Two of the main services that will not be billable under behavioral health redesign are primary therapeutic support and intensive case management, both of which are crucial services for these children and cost approximately \$2.5 million annually for all children currently served. We would suggest a more pragmatic approach.

One suggestion would be to continue the waiver outside managed care for one year. The funds have already been allocated and the expenses could be capped within that line item. A twelve-month reprieve would allow for the first point to occur during a budget bill, where such changes should occur, and allow for a more thoughtful integration with the managed care plans through High Fidelity Wraparound services rather than assuming a health benefit provider (managed care) has the in-place network ability to deliver these more social/family program benefits that yield health care utilization avoidance rather than directly obtain them through direct care. As PEP only occurs in Cuyahoga County, this approach may lead to a more universal program the balance of the state could utilize through true integration of these services under the more correct model of care.

We look forward to finding a way to collaborate our efforts to maintain this quality program for these children and continue providing them with the intensive behavioral healthcare that they truly need and deserve. We sincerely hope that you will work with us and the Department of Medicaid to find a way to continue funding for PEP Connections for up to the next 12 months or until a new Medicaid-reimbursable service, such as High Fidelity Wraparound, is implemented.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working together on this pressing threat to the children in our community.

Sincerely,



State Senator Dave Burke  
Ohio Senate District 26



State Representative Nickie J. Antonio  
Ohio House District 13

CC:

Director Barbara Sears,  
Department of Medicaid  
Director Tracy Plouck,  
Department of Mental Health and Addiction  
Services  
Director Greg Moody,  
Office of Health Transformation

State Senator Coley  
State Representative Huffman  
State Representative Romanchuk  
State Representative Ryan  
State Representative Emilia Sykes  
State Senator Vernon Sykes  
State Senator Tavares  
State Senator Terhar