March 25, 2026

Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board of Cuyahoga County
2012 West 25th Street, 6th Floor
Cleveland, OH 44113

Dear Chair James-Stewart, Vice Chair Dixon, Second Vice Chair Gohlstin, and members of the ADAMHS Board,

My name is Bree Easterling, and I serve as Senior Project Coordinator over the Criminal Legal Transformation team at Policy Matters Ohio. I am writing to express our strong support for the proposed funding agreement to establish the Behavioral Health Crisis Center in Cuyahoga County.

Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research institute dedicated to advancing policies that create a more vibrant, equitable, sustainable and inclusive Ohio. A core part of that work includes examining how public systems respond to mental health and substance use needs. We use our comprehensive research to advocate for approaches that treat these challenges as public health issues rather than matters for criminalization.

The Behavioral Health Crisis Center represents a critical investment in a more effective, humane, and trauma-informed crisis response system. Neighbors experiencing behavioral health crises face limited and often inappropriate options, frequently resulting in unnecessary emergency department utilization, incarceration, and in some cases even death. These outcomes are costly, inefficient, and disproportionately harmful to low-income individuals and communities of color.

As the behavioral health epidemic continues to bubble, it is crucial that we make sure our care continuum is properly equipped with the emergency response "big three": someone to call, someone to respond, and somewhere to go. The recent passage of Tanisha's Law and the expansion of Frontline's Care Response program is an incredible step in appropriately meeting the needs of communities across Cuyahoga County. However, with the growth in non-police care-centered options for community members to access, comes a need to establish more options for individuals experiencing crisis to go for immediate treatment in health-centered spaces.

Establishing a dedicated crisis stabilization facility will do just that. The Behavioral Health Crisis Center will help ensure that individuals in crisis are met with timely, trauma-informed care in an appropriate setting. This approach reflects a growing body of evidence and aligns with national best practices for behavioral health crisis systems, which emphasize diversion from jails and emergency rooms and connection to ongoing care.

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In addition to improving outcomes for individuals and families, the Crisis Center will strengthen the broader continuum of care in Cuyahoga County. It will expand system capacity, support first responders by providing an appropriate drop-off option, and serve as a cornerstone of a more coordinated, care-first approach to crisis response.

Policy Matters Ohio has long supported policies that divert reliance on law enforcement in behavioral health crises, and long emphasized investment in community-based care infrastructure. The proposed Crisis Center is a meaningful step in that direction.

We respectfully urge the ADAMHS Board to approve this funding agreement and move forward with implementation of the Behavioral Health Crisis Center. This investment will position Cuyahoga County as a leader in building a modern, equitable, and effective behavioral health system.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Bree Easterling
Senior Project Coordinator – Criminal Legal Transformation
Policy Matters Ohio