

OPINION

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Opinion: Declare a state of emergency on childhood trauma

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The state of Ohio is facing a public health crisis with responses that have for decades produced little to no solution. This public health crisis is childhood trauma. While the state of Ohio has invested billions of dollars in infrastructure around health care costs associated with trauma care, we continue to see an increase in adverse life experiences and shortened life expectancy along with an increase in juvenile detention and adult prison populations, both of which could be largely attributed to childhood traumatic events.

Research and increased collected data continues to demand the need for a significant call to action regarding childhood trauma. Ohio has shown its awareness of trauma as a salient issue that requires a critical response. To date, the awareness and investment by the state has yet to decrease the number of cases associated with trauma year after year.

The private sector and private non-profit organizations have been trying to merge state funding and private funding to provide a solution. The state's investment in and approach to both the cost and care of trauma has been noble. However, root causes and conditions of childhood trauma persist. Ohio has a mere five childhood trauma centers, all run by private nonprofit agencies.

In 2019, 28% of all children between ages 0-17 had experienced some type of childhood trauma. With 2.7 million children in Ohio, this means 729,000 children in 2019 had experienced one or multiple forms of childhood trauma. Private trauma centers can serve at best 300 children a year, demonstrating minimal access to significant, long-term, life-improving care.

It is estimated that abuse and neglect cost Americans \$80 billion in the direct costs of hospitalization, law enforcement, and child welfare and the indirect costs of special education, juvenile, and adult criminal justice, adult homelessness, and lost work productivity. One study has predicted that the cost of violence and abuse on the health care system ranges between \$333 billion and \$750 billion annually, or up to 37.5% of the total health care dollar.

Children who have suffered from multiple adverse childhood experiences or victimizations are at the highest risk for "losing fundamental capacities they need to develop normally

and to become successful learners and productive adults." Recent events as well as the pandemic continue to directly impact children in Ohio, showing that there is a critical need for trauma legislation and prevention along with the care. Trauma care is the response and reaction to a traumatic event. Trauma legislation and prevention is a proactive approach to and protection of youth from traumatic events.

Ohio has an opportunity to meet the needs of our children that are experiencing trauma through a multi-layered, multifaceted approach but also create a preemptive standard of accountability. By declaring a formal state of emergency on childhood trauma, Ohio would shift the institutional response to childhood trauma to a proactive approach beginning with addressing the conditions that create the byproduct that is childhood trauma and trauma response. This declaration would redetermine, and thereby reconfigure, the legal and operational resources available and has implications for governmental, private sector, and public outcome. The state of emergency on childhood trauma moves beyond providing services to changing conditions by setting precedent through state policy and community practice.

The declaration of a state of emergency on childhood trauma further triggers an array of authorities and actions by state and/or local governments. Actions that will engage authorities by a state emergency declaration would be called to include:

- Activation of state emergency response plans and mutual aid agreements.
 - Authority to expend funds and deploy personnel, equipment, supplies, and stockpiles.
 - Suspension and waiver of rules and regulations (and statutes, if allowed).
 - Streamlining of state administrative procedures such as procurement requirements.
- (See concurrent resolution attached)

We know that the community pays for the costs of all the long-term consequences of trauma. In all communities, children are the future – one we have the responsibility to rear as healthy and beneficial and in ways that contribute to the growth and health of their community or to the economic and emotional afflictions. These childhood lived experiences largely determine their future and ours. We see the impact of childhood trajectories through research on ACE scores.

Declaring a state of emergency is about creating a disruption to root causes that create trauma-inducing experiences with associated costs toward law enforcement and prison, courts systems, social services, medical and mental health care rather than investment in as well as beyond community infrastructure such as education and schooling, playgrounds and parks, libraries, etc. (See concurrent resolution attached). Those working in education, prisons, child welfare agencies, and juvenile justice have known this intuitively for a long time and research has and continues to support this.

All the lasting consequences of trauma come with significant costs to society. Declaring a state of emergency critically addresses substantial community needs for changed conditions and circumstances at a policy level and we will be remiss to not recognize the impact this has as we revisit the current financial burden on state resources. The state of emergency on childhood trauma not only highlights a shifted cognizance, understanding, and thereby distribution of emergency resources, it addresses root causes of the public health crisis that is childhood trauma by way of a statewide mandate.

We have created an informative video that provides the signs of childhood trauma. Please visit our site at <https://ohiostateofemergency.com/>. We need Gov. Mike DeWine to take a stand against the public health crisis. We need him to declare a state of emergency on childhood trauma. Help us help the children of Ohio.

Ronald Hummons is an author and mental health activist who lives in Reading. His son, TrePierre Hummons, was shot and killed by police in 2015 after TrePierre killed Cincinnati Police Officer Sonny Kim. Hummons runs a campaign to raise awareness and funds for undiagnosed mental illness in his son's name.