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**Attn: News Editors**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## Oakland county residents join thousands on state capitol steps for mental health rally



**OAKLAND COUNTY, MI (September 18, 2024)** – approximately 100 Oakland County residents, including individuals receiving public mental health services from the Oakland Community Health Network (OCHN), joined approximately two thousand Michigan citizens on the steps of the State Capitol in Lansing for the 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Walk-a-Mile (WAM) in My Shoes Rally.

WAM is hosted each year by the Community Mental Health Association of Michigan and its Community Mental Health partner organizations like OCHN. Advocates and persons receiving services share their lived experiences about how they benefit from individualized care and access to public behavioral health services.

The first WAM rally was inspired by OCHN's current Director of Advocacy and Rights, Vicki Suder. "WAM came about as an effort to let legislators know persons receiving services from the public mental health system matter and vote, and to have their voice heard by our elected officials," states Suder. "It is an incredible event to meet amazing, passionate people trying to live their best life. It's inspiring we've been able to offer this opportunity for people to have their voices heard for 20 years."

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This year's event informed rally participants and legislative leaders about the importance of the behavioral health system, suicide prevention efforts, the importance of exercising your right to vote, and putting an end to the stigma related to mental illness and developmental disabilities.

### **About OCHN**

OCHN is contracted by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to lead a provider service network that assists approximately 29,000 Oakland County citizens at more than 300 service sites across the county. People who receive public behavioral health services through OCHN's provider network include those who have an intellectual or developmental disability, mental health concerns, or substance use disorder. Most of these individuals have Medicaid insurance coverage.

OCHN's goal is to ensure these individuals are aware of and have access to services and supports that will improve their health and quality of life, as well as ensure their engagement in full community participation. Its mission to "inspire hope, empower people, and strengthen communities" reflects an unyielding belief in a "Valuable System for Valued People." Programs and supports provided by OCHN's service network are available at [www.oaklandchn.org](http://www.oaklandchn.org).

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