

Testimony Regarding the Ohio Department of DD

Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

March 15, 2017



Chairman Romanchuck, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, my name is Gary Tonks. I am the Chief Executive Officer of The Arc of Ohio. The Arc is Ohio's oldest and largest advocacy organization on behalf of Ohioans with developmental disabilities and their families. We represent over 300,00 Ohioans with varying disabilities, approximately 100,000 of whom are supported through the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and our 88 County Boards.

I rise in support of the Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Developmental Disabilities. We have been actively involved in the development and execution of budgets for over 66 years. Ohio has made tremendous progress through those decades; and, we applaud the Governor and this body for its continued support of our most vulnerable citizens.

We have so much more to do.

We have expanded needed supports to Ohioans with DD through the Home and Community Based Waiver Program but thousands continue to wait throughout the state. This budget gives hope to those who have not yet seen help. The Arc is currently working with the Administration to develop statutory and rule changes to more clearly identify individuals most in need of support.

Even if an individual has a Waiver, it has become increasingly difficult to find providers. The rates of pay are not adequate to attract or retain quality staff. Agencies are experiencing more than a 50% turnover and Independent Providers are often not accepting new individuals to support. This budget includes a Complex Need Add On which The Arc and our families recommended.

All direct support staff are critical to the success of our services, but currently, a staff person taking an ambulatory individual grocery shopping is reimbursed at the same rate as a staff person who much lift, feed, bathe and toilet an individual with complex needs. This budget, for the first time, recognizes the physical and mental strain this can cause; and, provides a rate add on for staff supporting an individual with complex care needs.

The budget also recognizes that in order to keep our seasoned and best trained staff, we must provide a financial incentive. While our staff are dedicated and salt of the earth people, they too must keep the lights on in their own homes and feed their own families. This budget provides a

modest incentive for those direct support staff who voluntarily pursue additional training, which we hope will decrease turnover.

I have had the honor of serving individuals with disabilities and their families, and The Arc, for over 40 years as a staff person and volunteer in four states. I have been the CEO of The Arc of Ohio for almost 20 of those years. Ohio, among all of those states, has demonstrated a caring and compassion that rivals none.

Our progress has been significant but I speak with individuals and families everyday who struggle. Our issues cross all socio economic factors. One in ten Ohio families is touched in some way by disability. We know that even with our current Opium crisis in Ohio, addicted women may give birth to children with disabilities.

Our challenges will continue as more children are born with or acquire a disability. The sooner we can intervene, the more likely the child will require less services as they develop.

Thank you for the support you have provided to those who need us most. And, thank you for what I know you will continue to do in the future.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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