



Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals
PO Box 218145
Columbus, Ohio 43221
866-862-2322
www.oadsp.org



Testimony before the House Finance Sub-Committee on Health and Human Services

Dear Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Bethany Toledo, I am the executive director of the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals, herein referred to as "OADSP". OADSP is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization whose mission is to provide support, development, and training opportunities to people working in the field of developmental disabilities. Our vision is a sufficient, highly skilled human service workforce, encouraging and supporting people with disabilities to lead self-directed lives.

Personally, I began working in the Intellectual/Developmental Disability field as a Direct Support Professional in 1999. Over the years, I developed a strong passion for supporting and arming staff with the knowledge and skills they needed to be successful with supporting people with disabilities. This passion led me to OADSP, where my fire was fueled by like-minded stakeholders, and I joined them on the journey to improve the status, image, and pay of Direct Support Professionals.

I am here today to testify in support of the proposed funding in HB 49 (as introduced) that will allow Direct Support Professionals with two years of experience and advanced training to earn a higher wage.

I would first like to share an excerpt from the preamble of the National Alliance of Direct Support Professionals Code of Ethics that paints a picture of what it means to be a Direct Support Professional.

(And I quote) "It must be the mission of the Direct Support Professional to honor the individual path suggested by the unique gifts, preferences, and needs of each person they support. DSPs walk in partnership with the person, and those who are significant to them, toward a life of opportunity, well-being, freedom, and contribution. While other professional groups (such as doctors, nurses, service coordinators, and social workers) are directed by clearly defined criteria, the DSP is directed by the person they support. Therefore, the DSP must exemplify ethical practice, high standards, and creative vision as they partner with those they support in order to engage (their) community and make everyday choices about their personal finances, physical well-being, social and intimate relationships, and employment. The entire landscape of a person's life can change through ethical and intentional direct support services.

The knowledge and skills of community support practice must be joined with the ethical principles to create the environment needed to fully support people in making life choices. To do so effectively, we must all recognize DSPs as professionals who have values, skills, and knowledge that constitute a unique and important profession, and who can infuse these beliefs into practice. Furthermore, there must be a commitment to hiring, developing, and supporting DSPs to create a healthy sense of their own worth and potential." (End quote)



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As indicated in this excerpt, the responsibilities of Direct Support Professionals are immense, and unique to each person supported. As a field, we have come so far with supporting people with disabilities through empowering choice and providing opportunities for people to live their lives on their own terms. This philosophy is echoed throughout the state, from the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities to providers large and small; however, the weight of putting this philosophy into practice on a daily basis falls on the shoulders of Direct Support Professionals.

Staff turnover and retention are ongoing challenges to providing the quality services and supports that people with disabilities deserve. The Direct Support Professional turnover rate is on average 50%, and is often a result of inadequate training, support, and low pay. In 2003, OADSP created a voluntary credentialing program for Direct Support Professionals to empower them with the skills and knowledge necessary to support people to lead self-directed lives. Data indicates that Direct Support Professionals with this advanced training have increased longevity and increased organizational participation. In addition, higher satisfaction is reported by people receiving services and their family members.

OADSP believes that in order to address the workforce crisis, and have a truly recognized profession, experience and advanced training must be tied to increased wages, just as it is for other professions. I have yet to meet an administrator that that does not wish to provide higher wages to Direct Support Professionals that exceed minimum training standards and demonstrate competency through their work. It is my humble opinion that that the proposed targeted increase in the budget will provide an unprecedented opportunity for us to do just that.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you, I will gladly answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted by Bethany Toledo on Tuesday, March 21, 2017 for testimony on Wednesday, March 22, 2017.