



Ohio Association of County Boards
Serving People with Developmental Disabilities
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Testimony of Bridget Gargan
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House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
House Bill 49 – State Biennium Budget
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Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member Sykes, and Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, my name is Bridget Gargan, and I am executive director of the Ohio Association of County Boards of Developmental Disabilities (OACB). OACB advocates on behalf of all 88 county boards of developmental disabilities. I am here today here to testify in support of the budget as introduced and to offer support for several provisions that promise to better address unmet service needs and improve the quality of services for people with developmental disabilities in our state.

County boards of developmental disabilities are unique among Ohio's public human services agencies in that they are responsible for supporting people in every stage of their lives. No other agency has this lifetime requirement. Because of this, county boards need to ensure that they are always maximizing available funds and using local resources in the most efficient and effective manner.

This lifelong commitment to supporting people with developmental disabilities is why OACB is focusing on policy changes in this budget that will permit a more predictable, flexible, and sustainable system capable of serving people with developmental disabilities and their families for many years to come. In addition to boosting county boards' efficiency, these policy changes will allow boards to more effectively solve problems on their own and in collaboration with local and state partners. These include the following:

1. Modernizing the Developmental Disabilities Waiver Waiting List

A critical aspect of the board's lifetime commitment to people with developmental disabilities is the financial responsibility that comes from enrolling a person on a Medicaid waiver. This responsibility only grows as a person ages and his or her services become more expensive.

Unfortunately, the process to enroll a person on a waiver has been made unnecessarily complex by a waiting list statute that is overly prescriptive and unresponsive to the true service needs of families. On a daily basis, county board service and support administrators (SSAs) must navigate these complexities and waste precious resources overcoming bureaucratic hurdles to connect families with services.

For this reason, OACB supports updating the DD waiver waiting list statute to more accurately identify and fulfill people's current and future service needs. Modifying the current waiting list process will enhance county boards' ability to more effectively and efficiently enroll people who are truly in need of services onto waivers – especially the 1,300 new state-funded waivers proposed in this budget, which I will address in a moment.

OACB continues to work alongside other system stakeholders and the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities to reach consensus on this proposal, and we support the direction the workgroup is heading. We plan to provide additional testimony in support of this change at a later date.

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2. Creating New State-funded Waivers to Fulfill Unmet Needs

OACB strongly supports Governor Kasich's proposal to fund 1,300 new Individual Options and SELF Waivers in this budget. We are confident that – with Director John Martin's commitment to distribute the waivers in a way that best fulfills the most immediate needs of people and their families – these new waivers will help provide access to services where opportunities would otherwise be unavailable. In addition, we appreciate Director Martin's willingness to use to criteria identified by the department's Waiver Workgroup when determining how these waivers should be allocated so that they are used in the most strategic way possible.

3. Supporting Training-Based Wage Increases for Direct Support Professionals

OACB has recently partnered with several organizations representing private service providers on ways that county boards can better support them at the local level. Throughout these discussions, we have been continually confronted with the reality that – unless providers are able to more competitively compensate their direct support professionals – neither county boards nor providers will be able to make meaningful improvements in even the most basic measures of care for people with developmental disabilities.

As such, OACB supports the provision in this budget that offers direct support professionals an opportunity to increase their hourly wages by up to one dollar per hour by completing 60 hours of training coursework. By incentivizing these service professionals to enhance their skill set in exchange for higher wages, we believe that the state can not only help reduce the high turnover rate that currently plagues provider agencies, but also improve the quality of care offered by existing direct service professionals.

4. Enhancing Support for People with Complex Needs to Improve Quality of Care

Last, but certainly not least, OACB supports the administration's proposed increase in waiver reimbursement for providers that serve people with complex care needs. People with complex care needs are those who are dependent upon others in all areas of daily living – for example, people who are unable to feed, dress, or bathe themselves. These individuals rely heavily on direct service staff, who must learn the person's non-verbal methods of communication and devise unique, customized strategies to help them with their everyday personal activities.

As you can likely imagine, having a high rate of staff turnover in these very intimate support positions can have a negative impact on a person's quality of life. Governor Kasich's proposal provides additional funding as an incentive for providers to serve people with complex needs, thereby allowing these individuals to retain their caregivers for longer periods of time. This provision supports the sustainability of our system by providing critical funding in an area where it will have a major and immediate impact – promoting the continuity, predictability, and longevity of providers in the lives of people with developmental disabilities. For these reasons, OACB fully supports the proposal.

Every day, county boards find themselves in the same position as the members of this subcommittee – forced to find ways to help a wide variety of people, the majority of whom have a growing list of critical needs, all while trying to responsibly manage a pool of increasingly-limited resources. We sympathize with your situation. However, the fact remains that Ohio's DD system is facing a time of great uncertainty and upheaval. The requests I have outlined in this testimony represent the absolute minimum of what it will take to successfully manage our system's continued evolution over the coming biennium. Your support for the items contained in the DD budget will help to ensure that necessary services for people with developmental disabilities are maintained well into the future. Thank you for your time and attention this afternoon. I welcome an opportunity to answer any questions you may have.