



# Choices In Community Living, Inc.

1651 Needmore Road, Dayton, Ohio 45414 ☎ (937) 898-2220 ☎ Fax: (937) 898-3553

[www.partnersohio.com](http://www.partnersohio.com)



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

Clinton Brown  
President

Janet Peasant  
Secretary

Eugene Aukerman  
Treasurer

Good afternoon, I am Tom Weaver, Chairman of the Board of the Ohio Provider Resource Association and the Executive Director of Choices in Community Living. Choices is a non-profit organization providing residential, day programs and non-medical transportation services for over 339 people in Preble, Montgomery, Clark, Butler, Warren, Greene and Madison County and employees over 342 people. What we do, what our staff provide is an invaluable service for those 339 individuals; we are the hands and feet, sometimes the eyes and ears, the gentle guidance, the caring and committed staff (Direct Support Professionals) who daily support and assist individuals with developmental disabilities to build safe, healthy and meaningful lives in our communities.

I am here today to request that the Ohio House of Representatives fully fund the Governor's developmental disabilities funding initiatives in HB 49 as introduced. HB 49 as introduced includes the provision for addressing the serious issue of adequate funding for Direct Support Professionals (DSP's). For those of us responsible for providing service on a daily basis, the single most critical issue we face is recruiting and retaining a quality workforce. It is not a small issue; it is of paramount concern to us and to our industry as it threatens our ability to continue to provide the services required for the individuals we serve. AND it is affecting the ability of individuals needing new or additional services to get the care they need. We simply cannot provide these services because we cannot hire enough DSP's! State wide, overtime rates are between 10% to 20%; concerning not only for the fiscal impact it has on our budget, but also the impact on staff burnout and quality of care considerations. At least 50% or more of our full-time DSP's are working other jobs to supplement the wages we can pay. Our continuum of care and services is at a critical juncture and needs to be addressed.

I think it would be good to note that our provider industry is being proactive and has dedicated a lot of effort and resources to assist in recruiting and retaining DSP's. There are many examples of collaborations and partnerships between providers, schools, Job and Family services and with county boards of DD to address this issue. There is collaboration and support from the Developmental Disability Council for statewide marketing tools, there are training programs in Ohio high schools like the 3

*assisting people with developmental disabilities to access safe, healthy and meaningful lives in the community since 1985*

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CPO program and with programs like Bridges Out of Poverty to help build a viable workforce. I believe it is also important to note that we understand wages and benefits are not the only relevant factors in defining a job that is attractive to employees. At Choices In Community Living we work very hard to recruit and retain those employees who tend to have a nurturing and caring aptitude, folks who go home feeling good about the work they provided that day. And we work hard at maintaining a strong agency culture of employee empowerment and participation, providing the tools, training, and support needed to be effective in providing quality services. These are factors within our capacity to impact and we exercise them well. Still we experience 45% turnover. In our recruitment efforts, we lose a significant number of candidates because we cannot match the competitive wages prevalent in the community. We recently met with job placement specialist at Montgomery County Jobs and Family Services. She reported that locally, jobs in logistics are starting people at \$12/hour or more and these jobs do not require experience or in many cases even a high school diploma. Certainly, they do not require the capacity to understand the complexity of providing medication administration or knowledge of how to properly care for someone who has behavior concerns as is the case with a growing number of individuals we serve. We use every means we can to control or reduce our administrative expenses so we can pay a competitive wage, yet we are still only able to start experienced DSP's at \$10 hour.

A DSP's job is difficult and carries a great deal of responsibility, accountability, and impact on an individual's life, yet the pay does not match up. We don't have holidays, nights off, weekends off in the provision of direct service. We are 168 hours a week, 52 weeks a year. Over 20% of our staff are eligible for benefits from public assistance programs such as food stamps, housing subsidy or health care subsidy. They don't want to be on these programs and would gladly exchange their subsidy for a wage increase. All of these factors come together to create a vacancy rate for DSP's larger than we have ever seen.

There is a significant push across the country and in our great state of Ohio to effectively bridge the barriers between people with developmental disabilities and the community at large. What this means is engaging individuals in smaller, meaningful ways with community life; in employment, in community services and life, and in relationships. This is important work and can be done in a way to build stronger communities that will embrace all people's value, even those with developmental disabilities. I feel it important to point out that we as a provider community have the passion to do this, that we as a society have the reasons and the

means to do this, what we need is the meaningful support of our legislators to help us make this happen.

House Bill 49 has set a path toward the continuation of this work by addressing the number one concern; the need for a well trained and experienced DSP workforce. This plan will provide a 6% add on for employees who have received 60 plus hours of training and have 2 years' experience. With this provision, agencies like ours will be structuring themselves in a way to support their employees to meet these criteria, a win-win for all. It is a comprehensive, finely interwoven approach to many of our system's immediate needs and is responsive in its approach to both the external and internal pressures our system currently faces.

Of course, workforce challenges are not unique to developmental disabilities. I know workforce challenges exist across a great many industries. But if I may, and in all due respect to those other industries, the comparison of our job responsibilities and the expectations we place on direct care staff and, quite candidly, the consequences of mistakes are in most cases not comparable. And our wages are directly tied to the fee for service reimbursements. Unlike other industries, we cannot raise our billing rates as we attempt to stay competitive in the employee market.

Please vote to support funding for the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities at the as introduced levels. Thank you.