

April 8, 2019, 12:00 Noon

Ohio House Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

Chairperson: Chairman Romanchuk, Ranking Member West, Representatives Kelly, Lipps, and Roemer:

MARK SCHLATER

My name is Mark Schlater, CEO for Toward Independence and Board President for Bridge2Equality. Today, I am here representing Bridge2Equality, a private non-profit entity, organized as a grassroots campaign across Ohio for one solitary effort to raise awareness on the workforce crisis and to promote positive action in support of individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities. In my 38 years of working in the field of developmental disabilities services, never have I seen such complete unity from all parties on this very important issue. From across Ohio, Bridge2Equality is supported by the Ohio County Board Association, Ohio Private Resource Association (OPRA), ARC of Ohio, Ohio Healthcare Association, Values and Faith, Ohio Waiver Network, Self-Advocates, parents, and families. On September 20, 2018, a rally was held in front of this Capitol Building to bring awareness to the staffing crisis facing many providers and agencies across Ohio. On May 16, 2019, another rally will be held in support of this great cause.

The staff that support individuals with developmental disabilities are called Direct Support Professionals or DSP's. They are the lifeblood in making the entire developmental disabilities service delivery system work or function; without these caregivers, the system simply will fail. You see, unlike any other business, we can't just place a sign at the drive-thru window or storefront indicated temporarily closed due to a staffing shortage. Providers across Ohio have to find a way to ensure services are provided to the individuals we serve. We must ensure their health and safety at all times.

Therefore, Bridge2Equality is extremely supportive of the increase in DSP wages proposed by Director Davis. This includes services in Day Habilitation, Homemaker Personal Care under the Waiver Program and Intermediate Care Facilities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities (ICF-IID). This allows us to be more competitive in trying to recruit and retain qualified workers. We are also appreciative on the proposed increase in the minimum wage component related to On-Site-On-Call services. We also support the proposed increases in the Transportation rates to ensure those individuals needing services to work can find that accessible service.

At this time, I would like to introduce Ben Young, Ben is an individual with cerebral palsy, and he has been a self-advocate all his life. With the assistance of his computer, he has developed his speech and would like to present to you now.

BEN YOUNG

Good afternoon. My name is Ben and I have Cerebral Palsy. Imagine with me that you are a person with a developmental disability who is also in a wheelchair, just like me. Imagine what it is like to have a stranger come into your home. That stranger will have to help feed you, clothe you, and clean you. You don't know if that same person is going to be there the next day. Or the next. Or if they will be gone and a new stranger will be coming. This has been my life as an adult. It has happened so many times, that I don't even think about it anymore. I have had to just get used to these facts of my life now. When I was asked what it is like to live like that, my honest answer was that I really don't know any other way.

Because of the staffing shortage, not only do I deal with the revolving door of strangers, but I also can't go to the functions in my community as much as I would like to. I am very involved in my church. In fact, I am on the Special Needs Ministry and help the church run smoothly and more adaptable to people with disabilities of all kinds. I want to attend meetings, and be a part of the decision making, and sometimes I can't go and participate like I want to, because someone called off or quit again and I don't have the transportation or coverage to attend the things I want to.

It also gets lonely sometimes. There have only been a couple of times that my staff have stuck around long enough to create a real lasting friendship with them. I have become used to the fact that they won't be more than an acquaintance or a paid staff there to do a job for a short time. I would love to have more friendships and longer lasting relationships with the people that take care of me.

A lot of times, the community, the government and others look at people with developmental disabilities as one big unit. But each and every one of us is an individual. My needs, dreams, and aspirations are different than the next person. In my lifetime I have seen four-bed homes close down, and those people have been moved to eight-bed homes, even if the people don't get along or blend very well. It was difficult for me to voice my opinion in a way that would allow me to live on my own or where I want to live. I am still fighting that fight.

We are here today to have a louder conversation. Help me to help myself by creating a unified voice that cannot be ignored. I don't want to just get used to the way things are, but I want to thrive and choose my own path for my life. Will you join me? Thank you for your time.

MARK SCHLATER

Thank you for providing us this opportunity to present to the subcommittee.

Respectfully

Mark Schlater and Ben Young