



Ohio House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Health and Human Services Chairperson Mark J. Romanchuk

Chairperson Romanchuk,

My name is Than Johnson and I'm representing in this testimony the Ohio Provider Resource Association (OPRA). I also serve as the CEO of CRSI, a non-profit private provider of services and supports for nearly 700 hundred individuals with disabilities in the great state of Ohio. OPRA represents 160 private provider organizations serving over 32,000 individuals with disabilities with a valued direct support professionals (DSP) workforce of over 24,000. As a statewide association, we join many of the other associations in the service of supporting Ohio citizens with disabilities and their families and friends, in supporting DODD and its Director Jeff Davis in their Ohio state budget proposals.

This testimony will be somewhat general in delineating the various initiatives and proposals put forth by Director Davis. Many other individuals will be presenting written and verbal testimony that provide specific support for specific initiatives.

The most pressing, critical issue today in our services is, the 'workforce crisis'. We cannot stress firmly enough the chronic challenge of finding an adequate pool of eligible workforce DSPs. The solutions are varied but much depends on the ability to attract a workforce that is provided an appropriate wage and benefits and that allows us to compete with other healthcare entities. Nearly 100% of our members are reimbursed through the combination state/federal funding of Medicaid and our ability to cost shift is limited. Therefore, we are appreciative of the DODD wage proposal to fund beginning wages near \$12.38. This is a major increase for which we are thankful. This increase will greatly assist, but many feel that to adequately compete, we will need even higher wage components in the future and are hopeful for additional increases as you legislate the DODD recommended budget to the Ohio House of Representatives and this most important Subcommittee. We also agree to provide validation that those increases go to the DSP workforce along with an understanding there are administrative costs associated with all increases.

There are other solutions to the workforce crisis beyond the primary needs for adequate wages. OPRA is supportive of removing the requirement of a GED for DSPs until the crisis is ended. We also see this as an opportunity to potentially hire more individuals with disabilities within our workforce. We will also work closely with DODD to increase the use remote technology and technology that increases the opportunities for individuals with disabilities to participate in the DSP workforce. OPRA also will avail our resources to assist in reducing those citizens receiving state/ federal benefits by offering training and job opportunities where appropriate.

OPRA is also appreciative that Director Davis has requested an increase for the 'On Site, On Call'(OSOC) wage, which will bring the Department of Labor current unfunded mandate of paying minimum wage for OSOC to an equal level as the current minimum wage. The current OSOC wage was based on a minimum wage of \$5.15 with little increase over the years.

We also agree with Director Davis ensuring that the current ICF/IID reimbursement formula within state statute, will be run in accordance to that statute language. This will allow for private providers to offer wage increases knowing they are within statute ceiling levels. OPRA is also in agreement with the increase in the Franchise Fee for ICF/IID providers. We appreciate Director Davis and his staff agreeing to keep additional revenue generated by the Fee increase within the ICF/IID system to assist providers in serving those citizens, both children and adult, challenged with acute behavioral issues.

We offer a sincere compliment to the staff of DODD in meeting with associations to reach a satisfactory agreement of how to implement a less harmful fee structure application. OPRA would also recommend serious consideration of an increase in day array reimbursement to adequately fund community integration and employment supports for individuals with disabilities.

We are also appreciative of the efforts by DODD to reach a satisfactory change to the Non-Medical Transportation (NMT) program that assists in the continuous shift from sheltered employment and facility-based day programming to supporting individuals to develop relationships and obtain employment and volunteer positions in the community. The changes take into consideration the need to transport individuals with disabilities to various places of employment and volunteer sites in the community rather than a centrally located sheltered workshop.

The final specific area that we pledge our commitment to assist is the implementation of the federal law for Electronic Visit Verification (EVV). OPRA has been an active participant in the stakeholders meetings conducted by ODM and we greatly appreciate ODM Director Maureen Corcoran and her staff's understanding of this critical issue.

I close on a very positive note. The field of Developmental Disabilities has never been in more agreement on the direction and actions to be taken to increase our support and positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities and their valued DSPs. This is a compliment to the current administration under Governor DeWine, self-advocates, parents, families, county boards, private providers, and the Ohio House and Senate. Together we will succeed.

Respectfully Submitted,

Than Johnson, OPRA