



## Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals

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### **Testimony before the House Finance Sub-Committee on Health and Human Services House Bill 166**

Chairman Romanchuck, Ranking Member West, and members of the Finance Health and Human Service Subcommittee:

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 intellectual and developmental disabilities, primarily Direct Support Professionals. Our vision is a highly valued and skilled human service workforce, encouraging and supporting people with disabilities to lead self-directed lives.

OADSP partners with organizations across the state to provide competency based training and development opportunities for Direct Support Professionals. We see ourselves as a safety net to help keep DSPs in the field. In addition to training, we provide valuable resources such as publications, host annual conferences and DSP recognition events, lead two statewide councils for DSPs and supervisors, and provide input to various stakeholder groups with, and on behalf of, Direct Support Professionals. I am here today in support of HB 166 and the budget initiatives proposed by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

This is personal for me. I began working in the Intellectual/Developmental Disability field as a Direct Support Professional in 1999 by simply answering an ad in a newspaper. I had no idea what I was signing up for, and I tried my best to not let it show during my early years as a DSP. I worked as DSP for ten years before becoming a program coordinator and getting involved with the Ohio Alliance of Direct Support Professionals. It was then that I joined OADSP's journey to improve the status, image, and pay of Direct Support Professionals. Over the years I have developed a strong passion for supporting and arming staff with the knowledge and skills they needed (and I wished I had as DSP) to be successful with supporting people with disabilities. If I had to guess, I would say that 80% of what I lean on to do my work today is drawn from a combination of my own experience as a DSP, and from the input of today's DSPs that I have the privilege of working with.

I have many friends and relatives that work as Direct Support Professionals, including my sister-in-law, two cousins, and my mom. My mom is a 66 year old widow that is raising one of her grandchildren. She doesn't have a retirement plan and, like so many DSPs, she lives paycheck to paycheck. A lifetime of devoting herself to a career that doesn't pay well means that she cannot even begin to dream of retiring.



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Low visibility and low pay also makes it difficult to recruit for new DSPs. I see this first-hand as OADSP works to provide secondary and adult education options. We partner with the Ohio Provider Resource Association to sponsor the Community Connections Career Partnership – Ohio (affectionately nicknamed (C3P(O))). This is a program that exposes high school student to the field of I/DD through combined classroom and internship work. During this program, students have the ability to earn industry credentials from OADSP that are recognized by the Ohio Department of Education as an alternative pathway to HS diploma. We also partner with adult education entities and county boards of developmental disabilities to provide training and education to adult non-incumbent workers. While it is exhilarating to educate adults and soon to be adults about career options for Direct Support Professionals, it is difficult to look these potential DSPs in the eye and know that they will struggle to support themselves and a family on the wages of a DSP.

Just as the workforce crisis cannot be blamed on wages alone, it cannot be solved through wages alone. Most people do not understand the difference between a Direct Support Professional and less complex care-giver type jobs. This is due in part to the lack of a standard occupational classification. While this is a subject to be addressed on another day, I would take to take this opportunity to share with you an attached a document that I recently prepared to help assist people in understanding the role of a DSP.

(See attached document: DSP Scope of Practice)

As you can see, the job of a DSP is complex. Supporting the DODD budget initiatives in HB 166 is a step in the right direction towards recognizing this complexity.

In closing, I urge each of you to join me in referring to the people who support those with disabilities as Direct Support Professionals, and when the time comes, to support the establishment of a standard occupation classification for DSPs. Ohio has the opportunity to set the stage for real change in the I/DD field for our entire country.

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

Respectfully submitted by Bethany Toledo on Monday, April 8, 2019 for testimony on Tuesday, April 9, 2019.