



Testimony on HB 166
House Finance Health and Human Services Sub-Committee

Chairman Romanchuck, Ranking Member West, and esteemed committee members.

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Brenda Smith and I am the Executive Director of a private nonprofit agency called Riverview Industries, Incorporated located in Ottawa County. We provide employment, adult day support, homemaker/personal care, and transportation services to 150 individuals across three northwest counties of Ohio. We value our 90 DSPs and the services they provide in employment, and home and community life.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Davis for the Department of Developmental Disabilities. With these budget initiatives and the leadership of Director Davis, I believe Ohio will continue to be a leader in the field of developmental disabilities. We have a longstanding, rich history of funding and providing a variety of meaningful, quality services that enhance the lives of the people we serve.

I am testifying before you for these reasons.

I want to show my support for the funding that is included for transportation in the budget submitted by Director Davis. Transportation continues to be the number one barrier to obtaining and retaining employment. For people with developmental disabilities, it can be even more challenging.

Quality integrated day services will rely on a system of transportation that will allow people, including those who use wheelchairs, to access a variety of community settings throughout the day in a vehicle that aligns with the group size.

Providers are responsible for ensuring individuals travel safely between service settings, including to/from work, community sites, lunch options and personal care settings. The rates must cover all of the expenses associated with operating a fleet of vehicles – fuel, maintenance, insurance, safety equipment, and parking costs when not in use. Additional cost factors include wages for logistics planning, fleet coordination, and of course, drivers.

I have been privileged to be a part of the committee that worked on transportation and we based our endeavor on the following foundations:

- Build transportation capacity for community-based and employment supports
- Increase flexibility of transportation
- Incentivize integrated supports – making sure the structure is fluid across services
- Reduce complexity in authorizing, providing and accessing transportation

The group also agreed on these non-negotiables:

- Need to allow Adult Day Service providers to bill transportation used for community access
- Need to incentivize for employment, off-shift, and weekends
- Need to support non-ambulatory people, people using wheelchairs

Why do I point all of this out? Because these things are important to the people we serve, and if we are going to do work on a service, it should be to improve their lives. That is the ball we keep our eye on.

Our agency serves people with significant needs and many of them use a wheelchair and need to be transported in a modified vehicle. We support Director Davis' proposal because it will fund this needed transportation so they can access their community.

Transportation will be an essential component in the provision of community-based services. We appreciate the collaborative work of the Ohio Association of County Boards, OPRA and the other members of the committee, along with the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities in redesigning the service and developing rates that will help break down the transportation barrier for the people we serve.

I want to share the need for updated rates for day services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Much has changed since 2007, when day services rates were developed – agencies privatized from county board operations and subsidies, regulatory demands have heightened, specifically the expectations of Community Integration and Employment First (requiring a path to employment, outcomes, and progress reports), extensive WIOA administration requirements, and day services DSP's are expected to be job trainers and skill-builders, assisting those who may have very significant or challenging needs in pursuing competitive employment and community inclusion.

As I said earlier, our agency serves people with very complex needs including medical and behavioral challenges. When the rates were built twelve years ago, there wasn't an expectation for day services to provide engagement in the community. The acuity assessment instrument, which drives the funding, continues to be completed with a facility-based setting in mind. Providing supports in the community is a completely different situation. A person could be assessed as independent in the safety of the four walls of our building, but may not, for a variety of reasons, have that level of independence in the community. This means that the staffing ratio the funding supports is not adequate for the level of need.

Again, our agency serves many people who use wheelchairs, therefore at least two DSP's are needed to ensure the safety of the individuals in the group when providing community-based supports.

Inclusion in the community is a powerful aspect of a meaningful life, and it is an honor to share in that experience with the people we serve. My concern is the funding is simply not there to sustain community integration long term.

As a provider of homemaker/personal care, we are very appreciative and supportive of Director Davis' proposal for DSP wage increases providing homemaker/personal care services, as well as the increase in the minimum wage component of OSOC.

Thank you again, for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you and if I can ever be of any help in this process please let me know.

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