

Caitlin Layton, State Director Best Buddies Ohio
Testimony before the 2019 Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
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Hello. My name is Catlin Layton, and I am the State Director for Best Buddies Ohio, a state affiliate of Best Buddies International. Founded in 1989, Best Buddies is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide opportunities for one-to-one friendships, leadership development, integrated employment, and inclusive living for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Thanks to the hard work of a dedicated group of parents, professionals, and friends, we opened our Ohio office in 2016. Currently, we deliver our unique inclusion programs to over 1,100 Ohioans with and without disabilities through Best Buddies chapters in 21 schools.

As you may know, without formal opportunities to get to know one another, people with and without IDD are unlikely to develop true social connections on their own. This is because of the social and physical barriers that stand in the way of meaningful interactions. Our time-tested friendship programs create a simple and effective pathway for people with and without IDD to get to know each other, and, as a result, we have found that participants with IDD have increased social integrated in their school or community, have increased involvement in leisure activities with a friend, and demonstrate improved social interactions. Participants without IDD become more aware that people with IDD can hold jobs in the community, support having neighbors with IDD, and are willing to work at a company that employs people with IDD.

Securing support from the state of Ohio would empower Best Buddies to fill a gap in school and community-based inclusion services offered to Ohioans. We seek an appropriation of \$250,000 each year of the biennium to double the amount of children and adults served through these programs. Specifically, we seek an appropriation of \$75,000 through the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities to serve adults with IDD through our college and community-based programs and an appropriation of \$175,000 through the Department of Education to serve youth with IDD through our elementary, middle, and high school programs. Overall, these funds would enable Best Buddies to serve 2,200 participants through 42 Best Buddies chapters by the end of the biennium. Thank you very much.