



THEALPHAGROUP

April 8, 2019

Dear Mr. Chairman Romanchuck, Ranking Member West, and esteemed committee members of the Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee,

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on HB166. My name is Liz Owens and I am the CEO of The Alpha Group. I have been in the field for 24 years. Alpha is a not for profit business headquartered in Delaware County with services provision in a total of nine counties in Ohio to over 670 youth and adults in Day Program, Transportation, Residential, Work Training, Placement and Job Coaching.

I am supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine, Director Davis for the Department of Developmental Disabilities, and Director Miller for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. With these budget initiatives and the leadership of Director Davis and Director Miller, I am hopeful about the future to continue providing quality services that will support, empower, and champion individuals with disabilities to achieve success on their path to independence.

I am submitting this testimony for these reasons:

First, I want to show my support for the funding that included for transportation in the budget submitted by Director Davis. My organization provides this service to 120 individuals or an average of 1,600 trips per month to get them to and from programs and community jobs. With this funding, we will be able to continue and expand our efforts.

Second, I want to share the need for updated rates for day services for individuals with developmental disabilities. My integrated day program staff supports our individuals to become a part of the community in which they live by volunteering for various projects and organizations. In 2018, our individuals completed 2,433 hours of volunteer experiences, giving back to the community. Although, this is the right thing to do for the individuals that we serve, this service delivery model creates higher costs associated with the increased staffing ratio of 1:6 in the community to ensure health and safety and the non-reimbursed transportation costs associated to these activities. As reflected above, today's services look very different from the services provided when the current rate model was implemented; a model that no longer funds today's service expectations.

In addition, I support the increased pay for direct support professionals. We employ over 100 staff. Our direct care professionals often work two jobs to make ends meet or work an excessive amount of overtime to meet the demands of the staff crisis. The wages they are currently paid make it difficult for them financially and difficult for us to recruit and retain staff. We are responsible to provide quality care to the individuals we serve. I know my staff are doing the best that they can but during this staffing crisis they are becoming worn out and do not have a work-life balance that they deserve. The increase is definite move in a positive direction.

Finally, I want to show my support to Director Miller's budget initiatives. Our staff works diligently supporting individuals in obtaining community jobs. We have also created a bridge program from the work training center to a community job by collaborating with community partners to create an intern program that provides individuals with an opportunity to develop the skills and the confidence to move to a community position. Alpha is now faced with the challenges of supporting the more difficult individuals in finding and maintaining community employment. Oftentimes, it is not their inability to complete the tasks of a new job. It is a secondary condition, such as anxiety, eating disorders or behaviors that become barriers to their success. The increased funding for OOD services will aid in supporting these cases.

Thank you again for the opportunity and privilege to share my thoughts with you. If I can ever be of any help in this process please let me know.

Respectfully,

Liz Owens, CEO

Helping People with ABILITIES Succeed.
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