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April 9, 2019

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Dear Chairman Romanchuck, Ranking Member West, and esteemed committee members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of **HB 166**. I am the Director of OakLeaf Services, a Center of Excellence for Adults at UCP of Greater Cleveland. UCP of Greater Cleveland, founded in 1950, is an \$11 million nonprofit leader serving individuals with disabilities. Two hundred dedicated employees provide 18 distinct programs and services to 1,300 individuals with significant and diverse disabilities on the continuum from infants to senior adults.

I lead the largest division of UCP of Greater Cleveland, OakLeaf Services. We annually serve approximately 600 individuals with a wide variety of intellectual and other disabilities with two overarching outcomes of Community Integration and Community Employment in four counties in Northeast Ohio. We serve people in two 8-bed ICF's, Adult Day and Senior Adult Day Support, Vocational Habilitation, Career Planning, Group Employment, Individual Employment, Non-Medical Transportation, and are a Community Rehabilitation Partner (CRP) of OOD.

In 2018, we placed 125 individuals, many of whom had the most significant level of disabilities, into integrated community employment, working on average 25.2 hours per week and earning \$10.08 per hour. We also have increasingly focused our efforts at working with transition-age youth, through six Project SEARCH job readiness training sites in northeast Ohio, extensive summer youth employment programming, and most recently, pre-employment transition services for younger high schoolers with disabilities.

Over my 28-year career in the vocational rehabilitation and developmental disabilities fields, I have seen significant changes, many of them positive, to the way services are delivered and the expectations for *person-centered* outcomes. These changes have improved the quality of life, self-sufficiency and independence of persons served. I am very proud to have worked for over 16 years for my current employer, a long-established, CARF-accredited premier provider of services to persons with all types of disabilities.



**LeafBridge:** A Center of Excellence for Children

**OakLeaf:** A Center of Excellence for Adults

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I am very 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. I am submitting this testimony for the following reasons:

**Increased Direct Support Professional (DSP) Wages:** I greatly applaud the proposal to increase Direct Support Professional (DSP) wages 11% over the biennium. This will help attract and retain staff to our field and promote better services and supports for persons with disabilities.

**Updated Medicaid Waiver Payment Rates for Adult Day Services:** The rates for providing adult day array services (adult day support and vocational habilitation) have not evolved with community integration mandates. In fact, they have not changed at all since 2007. They do not allow agencies like UCP to provide the level of community integration and movement along the path to community employment desired by individuals served or envisioned by Ohio's Employment First Initiative, without significant financial consequences for our agency due to the antiquated rate model currently in effect. Please consider beginning the process to revise these rates to reflect the new expectations for taking persons served into the community on a regular basis based on individual, not group, needs and desires.

**Increases to Rates for Transportation:** I am pleased to see that funding for transportation for community integration has been proposed in this budget. This is currently an unfunded mandate that creates barriers to many individuals seeking to become more engaged with their community. There are also positive changes to Non-Medical Transportation that not only offer increased rates but also more flexibility in providing transportation to persons served.

**Positive Changes to the OOD Fee Schedule:** I fully support and applaud the proposed Budget Investment Strategies of OOD, with a particular focus on: Transition-age youth with the intent of preparing them earlier for employment through Pre-Employment Transition Services Expansion. This meets the increasing federal set-aside requirement as well as the goals of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). I also commend the addition of this service to the general OOD Fee Schedule, as opposed to it being a contracted service; and VR Fee Schedule Enhancements, especially increasing rates to providers for VR services by 6.5% across the board, and 8% for job development. This will have a great positive impact on our agency's ability to continue to train, place and support persons with disabilities in employment.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. Please let me know if I can be of any help in the current budgeting process.

Sincerely,

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