

BELCO WORKS, INC.

Accredited by the Commission on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities

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

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

I provide the following testimony in support of HB 166. My name is Anne Haning and I am the CEO of Belco Works, Inc. in Belmont county, Ohio. We are a not for profit business that privatized from the county board of DD in 2009. Our organization serves 230 individuals with developmental disabilities, supported through 95 staff members. We provide a full array of adult services, including vocational habilitation, adult day supports, non-medical transportation, community employment, group employment, and homemaker personal care. Belco Works, Inc. provides services funded through DODD and OOD.

Our location in the southeast region of the state is a predominately rural area experiencing many economic and social challenges. These factors add another layer of challenge in serving our citizens with developmental disabilities, who are often disproportionately affected by such economic and social/cultural impacts.

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. With these budget initiatives and the leadership of Director Davis and Director Miller, Ohio can continue to ensure that our citizens with disabilities have maximum options for services that support achievement of their individual goals. Our service system must adapt to changing expectations by individuals served as well as the general public. This demands flexibility within the system and adequate funding for the items contained in HB 166.

I am submitting this testimony for these reasons:

First, I want to show my support for the funding that is included for transportation in the budget submitted by Director Davis. Belmont and surrounding counties have very limited public transportation options. As a result, Belco Works provides the majority of individualized transportation of individuals to community locations, including jobs, community activities, or other community-based options of choice. Our staff primarily use their personal vehicles for such transportation. Otherwise, the people we serve would not be able to access their community as they desire and as envisioned by DODD and CMS. As we transition from facility-based services, our resources are being depleted as demand rises, especially in light of the need for such activities to be staffed at much higher ratio in the community than has been historically practiced within facilities. The proposal for non-medical transportation will encourage more cost-effective vehicles and eliminate trip limitations, allowing providers such as Belco Works to afford to maintain and expand individualized transportation.

Second, I want to share the need for updated rates for day services for individuals with developmental disabilities. Improved rates for adult day services could be addressed through revision of the acuity assessment instrument to more accurately reflect provision of services in the community. The original rates and instrument were developed at a time when the majority of services were facility-based and provided by county boards rather than private businesses. Belco Works provides daily opportunities for individuals to participate in community-based vocational and recreational activities but this requires significant staffing increases in order to assure safety as well as practicality.

In the midst of the workforce crisis, it is a huge challenge to employ adequate numbers of staff to serve 230 individuals safely as they transition to community-based options. We have had the unfortunate experience of declining a few referrals with highly individualized needs due to our workforce shortages. The risk of compromising individuals' safety is simply too high. While we recognize that wage increases realized through rate changes will not totally resolve the workforce crisis, any action that supports recruitment and retention of quality DSP's will be progress on this issue.

Finally, I want to show my support Director Miller's budget initiatives. OOD funding is a critical factor in the shift to community employment. Through OOD Employment First and school-to-work transition funding, we have successfully placed almost 25 individuals during the last two years. Our transition services for students continue to increase, providing vital opportunities for these young people to gain valuable work experience before they graduate from high school. We would not be able to achieve any of these outcomes without OOD funding for individualized services.

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,



Anne Haning
CEO