

April 9, 2019

From: John R. Hannah, President of People First of Ohio and an Individual Living with Developmental Disabilities

Ohio House of Representatives, Sub-Committee on Health and Human Services
To: Chairman Mark J. Romanchuk

Chairperson Romanchuk,

My name is John Hannah and I am representing People First of Ohio as their President. People First is an Advocacy Group made up of only self-advocates. I represent the voice of people whose true life experiences speak volumes about their lives. Our Board truly consists of only self-advocates, the only Advocacy Group to do so in the State of Ohio. I am also an Individual who lives with disabilities. I have long term disability experience, as I have lived with myself for almost 63 years. I am writing a testimony to the committee about a few issues, first and foremost getting Direct Support Professionals (DSP's) a livable wage. While keeping with the current economy, I believe \$13.00 an hour in this budget is a good way to make DSP's a realistic wage in which they can survive life as they live it. The current average is about \$9.50 an hour. I think we fail to remember what it is like to serve our most vulnerable individuals unless we step in their shoes. Important issues that matter to People First are many. My focus is on the DSP Shortage and Transportation as we see and experience today. I am a person with a disability also; I will be turning 63 on July 26, 2019. I could fit as a person with a disability or the aging population. No matter which way I would go, I would still need a direct support professional to assist me in what I need per my Individual Service Plan. This is true for all people with disabilities.

Whether you're in the DD population or the aging population, the DD Field will always need DSP's. The DD Field does not have compatible wages within the community. Fast Food restaurants get paid more than DSP's. It is hard to successfully fill positions when it is much easier to flip hamburgers. I am also in favor of County Boards giving a CHOICE of all options for individuals, family members, parents and guardians. All people deserve to be respected and to receive assistance to make their lives better. Whether you have ICF's, I/O Waivers, Level One or other support services, you are still going to need people to work in those locations. With direct support professionals, they work all holidays and evenings, all night and weekends. We should not have to compete against nursing homes or other levels of service no matter what needs present themselves. We are competing with Speedway, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Children's Care Services, you name it! Unlike motels who can go to other foreign countries to get workers, the DD field needs people that can speak the same language. So much work is done

with individuals. My nephew works at a bacon factory and they get a lot of workers from other foreign countries. It is important that they have an interpreter to communicate with the workers. It would be hard for me to learn a foreign language, that is why we must pay the direct support professionals a living wage.

The second important issue I would like to speak about is Transportation for People with Developmental Disabilities. I live in Champaign County. Urbana Ohio is the county seat for Champaign County. In Champaign County we have what we call CTS, Champaign Transit Services. Transit only works Monday through Friday from 8am to 4:30pm. It is often difficult to get an open spot. If a person needs anything done on the weekends or a holiday you are stuck at your residence. If you need to go out of the County for a doctor or hospital visit you must give them 48 hours' notice. I cannot imagine what it is like for people with disabilities in all Ohio counties to find ways to get where they need to go for their own health and welfare. People must have support and provider's must have the means to offer transportation to all people with disabilities. Of course, this would be a cost that needs to be covered in the budget.

By staff having other opportunities to work in community settings, there is a high turnover rate for staffing in the DD Field. Earlier I gave a reference about people that work and times when they can go to other countries to get workers. It is hard for Champaign Residential Services to find quality workers when they make close to poverty level. There has not been a significant increase for staff who work in the DD Field. Please keep in mind that to fully understand, one must walk in the shoes of the people who desperately need services without cuts. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

John R. Hannah

John R. Hannah, People First of Ohio President

Individual with Developmental Disabilities in Champaign County, Urbana Ohio