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Ohio Senate  
Finance Committee  
June 5, 2019

Chairperson Dolan and Esteemed Senate Finance Committee Members,

Automatic doors and ramps are a necessity to many people with disabilities. However, their impact pales in comparison to that of the direct support professionals who impact their quality of life on a daily basis.

My name is Patricia Otter and I am here to provide testimony in support of the Department of Developmental Disabilities state budget proposal. I speak on behalf of UCP of Greater Cleveland where I serve as President & CEO. Our 200 exceptional staff serve over 1300 children and adults with developmental disabilities every year. We offer a range of services (pediatric therapies, adult residential, adult vocational) to individuals with a wide range of disabilities, not only cerebral palsy. For several decades, we have been known as the agency to serve those with the most significant and complex physical disabilities.

Four years ago, I made the very difficult decision to end our in-home support services to 52 individuals with disabilities. We laid off 100 staff members. While we maintained all other services, we could not sustain the in-home service model due to low wages, turnover and the lack of qualified direct support candidates. I felt strongly that those individuals being served were not receiving satisfactory services and that they deserved better. I honestly do not know HOW other service providers can afford to offer these services! Today, UCP experiences similar issues with staffing of our group homes and our substantial level of community integration and community employment services.

**For just a moment, please place yourself in the shoes...or wheelchair... of an individual with a disability who is dependent upon one or more strangers to assist with feeding, toileting, dressing, etc. Do you want the people supporting you to make a livable wage? Or shall we pay a non-livable wage so that you continue to experience a 60% turnover of staff of everchanging faces or, worse yet, have no support at all?** As an agency committed to providing quality services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, this investment helps ensure my agency can continue to provide the array of services that we offer today and to not have to apologize to my hardworking staff (the 40-50% of them who stay) for paying them so little.

On behalf of my agency, my staff, and the individuals we support, I encourage you, Senator Dolan, Committee Minority Leader, Senator Vernon Sykes, and Members of this Committee, to support the proposed budget provisions relevant to the Department of Developmental Disabilities. **Your support will indicate that you share in our belief that Ohio's citizens with disabilities should be granted the same opportunities that all others are afforded and enjoy.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Patricia S. Otter  
President & CEO

