

# Ohio Senate Committee on Medicaid

May 19, 2015

Testimony of William J. Weldon Family, Parents of a Developmentally Disabled Worker

Chairman Senator Burke, Vice-Chair Senator Manning, Ranking Minority Member Senator Jones, and Members of the Ohio Senate Medicaid Committee. We are the Weldon family. My name is Bill, and this is my wife, Sue, and our son David. We appreciate the opportunity to present our concerns regarding proposed legislation that would possibly adversely affect employers such as TAC Enterprises in Springfield, Clark County Ohio, and other sheltered workshops.

Although we are led to believe that proposals to close employers such as TAC are no longer being considered, we still have concerns about the future nature and purpose of these important facilities. Our concerns are statewide in scope, but our comments that follow are related to our personal experiences at TAC Enterprises.

## IMPACT TO LOCAL COMMUNITY

- TAC currently has about \$4.8 million in local business contracts and \$3.2 million in government contracts. A few examples: They manufacture and repair cargo nets for the U.S. Air Force, make computer and electronic cabinetry, create ornamental garden stones, run a hydroponic garden that sells produce to Springfield schools and local restaurants, and assemble sub-components for use in automobile seatbelt assemblies. Our son does not have exceptional fine motor skills, but he, on average, completes about 100 of these devices each day. (My wife and I have tried, but we have yet to complete even one of these devices.) All this is meaningful, productive work for the 300 I/DD people that work at TAC.
- Regarding the Air Force contract, TAC is the sole source contractor for this service. This represents strong support for the Air Force mission as well as national security. This is truly meaningful work.
- TAC has established a reputation for providing quality work and on-time delivery. Local companies that contract with TAC appreciate the meaningful contributions to their bottom line.
- About \$3.5 million in wages were paid out during 2014.
- Should TAC be re-purposed from a viable employer to something akin to an adult daycare center, all this would go away.

## IMPACT ON CURRENT EMPLOYEES

- We are told that current employees of sheltered workshops such as TAC would have up to eight years to find “community employment”. If they do not find such employment in that timeframe, what happens? We’ve not been told.
- Assuming substantial numbers of the I/DD population could find jobs in the community (and it is unclear at this time how that would happen), would the community employers be willing to provide the services that many of these people require? They need assistance with going to the bathroom, or they might have behavior problems, or they might have epileptic seizures, or any number of issues. The staff at TAC is already in place and trained to deal with these issues on a daily basis. Would community employers be willing to pay for such services? I doubt it. At least not without substantial financial incentives. Who will pay for these services?
- Because virtually no I/DD workers have a driver’s license, how these workers would get to work? Currently, we have a transportation system that transports workers from their homes to TAC and then back home. This model is basically many homes-to-single employer. If the current workforce is forced into community employment, the transportation model becomes many homes-to-many employers. The costs associated with transporting workers to the various employers in many locations would increase dramatically over the current model. More vehicles need to be purchased (most of which would require wheelchair accessibility) and more drivers and trained aides need to be hired. Who will pay for these increased transportation costs?
- Also regarding transportation, bad weather presents a problem. The transportation system in Clark County defines criteria where the transportation system may be delayed or even cancelled depending on the severity of weather conditions. No company that we are aware of expects their employees to stay home during snow emergencies.

## IMPACT ON FUTURE EMPLOYEES

- Should sheltered workshops such as TAC cease to exist as viable employers, potential workers in the I/DD population would no longer have the choice to work for these employers.
- In the two years since the inception of the Employment First initiative, the picture of employment opportunities has been rather dismal. Of the 57 individuals at TAC who have discussed employment options, 6 job tryouts have been conducted and 4 people found jobs in the community. Of these, 1 person is employed for 6 hours per week, 1 person for 1 day per week, and 1 has been let go. All supplement their job with services provided by TAC. It is not clear that the future will provide a better employment picture.
- In discussions regarding Employment First assumptions held at meetings of the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, and other civic organizations, community employers overwhelmingly respond that they most likely would not consider hiring people with significant disabilities. Without employers

like TAC, will disabled people be relegated to living at home 24/7, essentially doing nothing while employment agencies attempt to find them jobs that might not even exist?

#### EMPLOYMENT AND OTHER SERVICES

- The Governor's Strategic Planning Leadership Group refers to “employment” as 1 – 20 hours per week. Our son is working 28 hours a week and could work up to 35 hours a week at TAC. He also earns vacation time and sick leave. The experiences we have already described indicate that David would most likely have reduced work hours if forced into community employment. According to a resolution by the Geauga County Board of Developmental Disabilities, the state of Vermont closed their sheltered workshops 12 years ago. During those 12 years, only 38% of their clients found employment in the community, and only for an average of 16 hours per week. We urge Ohio to not follow that path.
- TAC provides opportunities for advancing social and artistic skills. There are cooking classes, art classes, computer classes, and most important of all (at least for our son, David), the TAC Choir. This group performs at many events throughout the local community, such as nursing homes, community festivals, the annual Ohio Music Educators Organization (OMEEO) convention, and has even performed in this very Statehouse.

#### BOTTOM LINE

- While we, in general, support the premise of community based employment, it must be understood that few I/DD individuals are perfectly suited for that type of work environment. Each individual has different needs. It is impractical and unfair to lump all I/DD people into a single category, and expect them all to function well. Most importantly, both the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Supreme Court’s Olmstead decision state that each I/DD person is entitled to treatment in the most integrated setting possible FOR THAT PERSON (Emphasis added).
- TAC Enterprises is a viable employer that provides meaningful and rewarding work for its client base. It provides a substantial contribution to the local economy. It provides important services and products to its customer base, both at the local and national level.
- Contrary to what “advocacy” organizations such as Disability Rights Ohio have indicated, employers such as TAC do NOT serve to isolate or discriminate against the I/DD population. In fact, their workers are seen at amusement parks, sporting events, shopping centers, voting booths, and churches on a regular basis.
- Our son is part of a group of Ohio’s most vulnerable citizens who often do not have advocates who truly represent their needs and desires. Sue and I are aging parents who are not far from requiring living assistance ourselves. We rely on TAC to provide our son with a meaningful and rewarding employment experience.

We know this is a difficult process for everyone here, but especially for you as the decision-makers. We urge you to consider our thoughts as the proposals for sheltered workshops, care centers and care providers move through the legislative process. We especially urge you to retain the amendment that the Ohio House has made to the budget proposal that requires the DODD to support sheltered workshops at their current level of participation. This will allow employers such as TAC Enterprises to continue as viable entities that provide meaningful and rewarding employment opportunities for I/DD individuals.

Thank you so much for listening to our concerns.