Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee Testimony by Amanda Runyon Lynch

June 5th, 2018

Chairman Burke, Ranking member Tavares and other members of the Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee, My name is Amanda Runyon Lynch and I'm a member of CP Parent Columbus, a family resource group for individuals who have a loved one with Cerebral Palsy, former parent member of Ohio Help Me Grow, and Hand in Hand: The Domestic Employers Network.  Today I write expressing my strong opposition to S.B 218 – requiring Medicaid providers to obtain a surety bond at their own expense.

I am a single mother of a 16 year-old who requires direct care for all of her activities of daily living. With no living family to pitch in, my daughter relies on direct service providers to attend to her basic human needs -- that provider has mostly been me for the past calendar year. To wit, I am a 47 year old woman and my stamina and physical strength can only last so long. I dead lift my 75 pound child at least 10 times a day. I change her diapers every 2 hours, monitoring for skin breakdowns. I puree her meals in a special blender and feed it to her by spoon. I make herbal tea and give her sips of it throughout the day. I dress her and brush her teeth, put on her bras and socks and eyeglasses. I use a machine to suction secretions that clog her nose and throat so that she can stay healthy and free of pneumonia. My daughter had the same provider for 12 years, a heroic woman who never received a single day of sick pay, never had health benefits for herself or her minor children, never got a pay raise, had no one to replace her on the job if she was ill, and never in 12 years had a paid vacation. Can you imagine? This is what we expect of the independent direct service providers (DSP) in the state of Ohio. We expect them to pay a fee of $150 to the State in order to apply for this thankless job and now it's being proposed to up the ante and expect them to also pay $300 for a surety bond?

Most DSPs know they could earn almost the same amount at a fast food restaurant and likely enjoy superior benefits. But they stay and work with our children - so that we parents can have jobs and exercise and cook meals, do laundry and shop for groceries independently. They stay because they feel a calling, because they love our family members and us. They stay because they are good at it and the work is rewarding.

Due to a lengthy hospital stay, we lost our long-term provider mid-2017. My daughter and I have struggled since then- I with chronic back pain and limited availability to attend my paid job. My kid with increased periods of sitting that has led to multiple muscle contractures and increased stiffness of muscles. As she becomes more complex to care for, the prospects of attracting new providers dim. Why care for a full-care teenager when you can visit an elderly woman, watch soaps with her and hand her a pill every now and then?

This bill would be yet another barrier to recruiting and retaining people to work as direct care providers.  There is already a huge shortage of providers which this would exacerbate.  This bill would have real negative consequences for families like mine.  It would shrink the available, qualified provider workforce and diminish the prospects of recruiting new hires.

What we do need are more benefits and increased supports for direct service providers to compensate them for the critical work they do.

Independent providers in Ohio are already tasked with keeping all of their own records and are subject to more frequent and more rigorous auditing than agency providers, yet families across the state overwhelmingly prefer IP's to agency coverage to meet the needs of their loved ones with disabilities.  Recent developments in the area of licensure requirements and the introduction of Electronic Visit Verification are driving providers away to other fields of work. This measure would be another nail in the coffin of our hopes to recruit adequate new workers to the DSP ranks.

We need to promote these jobs and make them more attractive to job seekers, not less.  
Please consider these factors whenever you are faced with any proposed changes that would make it harder for someone to earn their living as a helper to persons with disabilities in our state. I urge you not to support this measure.

Thank you and I hope you take this to heart.