

Testimonial of John Ballard, Executive Director

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Board Member, Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council

Member, Summit County DD Transportation & Employment Collaboratives

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Chairman La Rose, Ranking Member Schiavani and Distinguished Committee Members, I am asking for your consideration in the passage of H.B. 195, which will have the following outcomes for Ohio and Ohioans with a disability:

1. More Ohioans will be able to find and keep jobs.
2. More Ohioans will be able to enjoy the self-respect and self-esteem that comes with becoming more independent, more included and less reliant on other tax payers.
3. A positive step will be taken to addressing the critical labor shortage in several regions of Ohio.
4. Ohio's private sector, both for-profit and non-profit, will have the opportunity to address what has become a 'perfect storm' safely and more efficiently. The jobs are out there, but affordable transportation is an obstacle today.
5. Transportation expenditures for Ohio Medicaid in their Home Choice Program will be cut significantly, as has been already demonstrated for those who are allowed to use ride sharing services. In our Tri-County area, we have reduced Medicaid's per trip costs by 80% with ride sharing services.

In June of 2015, the Ohio General Assembly passed a budget that included significant funding for OOD and Employment First. On July 1, 2015, the Governor declared that Employment First is a major priority for the State of Ohio. Further, he announced that all County DD Boards must begin phasing out all of their sheltered workshops as well as their transportation systems by specified dates and work to develop competitive integrated employment opportunities for everyone possible or face a loss of funding.

Summit County, for example, soon created collaboratives in response to the Governor's call to action. All providers and potential providers were welcomed to participate.

As a member of both the Employment and Transportation Collaboratives, I found quickly that we could develop jobs, especially in this current labor market. I found companies that were walking away from opportunities to expand, as they could not find enough reliable/qualified employees. We have been very successful at identifying qualified employees for many of these employers and we have been able to help them reduce their labor costs, through lower turn-over, lower absenteeism, and lower overtime, while we helped individuals transition from a Sheltered Workshop to community employment.

However, the largest hurdle has been transportation. Even our urban areas served by public paratransit service have very limited hours and days of service. Employers often require employees who can work 2nd or 3rd shift and weekends, as I did when I entered the workforce. Our paratransit system does not have the funding to expand. It is painful indeed to find employers who are willing and ready to provide good competitive integrated employment opportunities and I have to decline their offer.

And then things got worse. A Federal Judge blew a billion dollar hole in Ohio's budget and our transit authorities and paratransit services were hit hard financially. Between this and the opiate crisis, the Ohio General Assembly was hard pressed to provide additional funding for this and many other issues in the current budget cycle.

However, with the passage of HB 195, the General Assembly can enable Ohio's private sector, including non-profits, to utilize low-cost innovations that are working in other States and make forward progress in making our State more inclusive and accessible for all Ohioans, without further State investment at this time.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am glad to answer any questions.