



Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities

Mike DeWine
Governor
Kevin L. Miller
Director

Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired
Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation
Division of Disability Determination

**Testimony of Kevin L. Miller, Executive Director
Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities
Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid
Wednesday, May 8, 2019**

Chairman Hackett, Vice-Chair Huffman, and Ranking Minority Member Thomas and distinguished committee members, my name is Kevin Miller and I am the Director of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). I am pleased to present our 2020-2021 Biennial Budget for your consideration.

Moments after being sworn in, Governor Mike DeWine made clear his commitment to individuals with disabilities by signing an Executive Order (2019-03D) that establishes Ohio as a Disability Inclusion State and Model Employer of Individuals with Disabilities. Further, in his State of the State address he said, “We have a shocking number of our fellow citizens with disabilities who are unemployed or grossly underemployed. This is wrong.” The budget before you reflects Governor DeWine’s commitment by investing in Ohioans with disabilities to ensure they are not left behind.

OOD serves eligible individuals with physical, mental, intellectual and emotional disabilities, beginning at age 14. By working with community partners throughout the state of Ohio, we provide direct, personalized services to help individuals with disabilities find and retain meaningful work. Examples of these services may include career exploration, assistive technology, training, job placement services and supports for the individual once hired. If an individual with a disability is unable to work, then OOD’s continuum of service assists them through our Division of Disability Determination (100% federally-funded by the Social Security Administration).

OOD’S MISSION AND FOCUS

Independence for Ohioans with disabilities is the mission that unites and drives all aspects of OOD. We support individuals who want to work to develop the skills and competencies they

need to obtain employment in Ohio's growing economy. According to current census data, there are more than 1.6 million Ohioans with a disability. Nearly 870,000 of those Ohioans are of working age. Employment provides an opportunity for Ohioans with disabilities to participate in their communities, achieve financial independence, and find their purpose.

Five years ago, OOD eliminated a substantial waiting list for services, and for the first time since 1991, we serve all eligible individuals with disabilities without delay. We continue to relentlessly pursue efficiencies utilizing Lean Six Sigma principles to improve individual outcomes based on data-driven metrics. For example, we have reduced the time it takes to serve an individual from the time of application to employment and we have increased the average hourly wage for individuals with disabilities. Our innovative approach to partnering with Ohio businesses has increased accessibility to jobs through a network of employers that rely on OOD to help fill their in-demand jobs.

According to our recently published Statewide Needs Assessment, more than 112,400 Ohioans with disabilities want to enter the workforce but remain unemployed. Over the last three years, we served approximately 29,200 annually, which represents a mere 26% of those individuals who could benefit from our services.

OOD's Budget as a Vehicle for Investment

For each \$1 of state investment, OOD draws down an additional \$3.69 in federal vocational rehabilitation grant funds to support our efforts in Ohio. Governor DeWine's Executive Order and vision for Ohio presents an important opportunity for us to build upon our successes and serve even more Ohioans with disabilities. The budget before you strengthens our current programs and provider partnerships by developing new patterns of service to ensure we are meeting the employment needs of all Ohioans with disabilities. In addition, OOD will play a significant role in Governor DeWine's RecoveryOhio efforts by emphasizing work as an important component of recovery.

RecoveryOhio. According to the RecoveryOhio Advisory Council Initial Report published this March, work has a critical impact on an individual's recovery. This budget supports OOD's efforts to address the opioid crisis that touches the lives of so many Ohioans. The resources in this budget will allow OOD to replicate a successful model established in partnership between Butler County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery Services Board and Common Pleas Judge Keith

Spaeth's drug court. In this model, OOD embeds a vocational rehabilitation counselor as an active member of the drug court team. This innovative partnership allows OOD to rapidly engage individuals in services to assist them in obtaining employment.

High School Students with Disabilities. This budget expands an existing partnership between OOD and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), called the Ohio Transition Support Partnership, which allows students with disabilities to engage in career exploration and skill development at a younger age. Under this partnership, OOD counselors educate parents, teachers, and students with disabilities on the importance of work and how it can have a positive impact on their purchasing power, life expectancy, and independence. Together they develop strategies to help students secure employment prior to graduation or transition to post-secondary education.

Approximately 52,000 students with disabilities who are receiving services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) are potentially eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. Our successful partnership with ODE has significantly increased the number of students with disabilities served by OOD. In fact, the number of students with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 18 who applied for OOD services has increased by more than 23 percent from Federal Fiscal Year 2015 to 2018. In addition, OOD is connecting with more youth at a younger age. The number of youth ages 14 to 15 at the time of application increased nearly 71 percent over the last three years. The current investments have resulted in more employment outcomes for Ohio students with disabilities and this budget will further our efforts to reach this ever-growing population.

College School Students with Disabilities. This budget also invests in funding for direct services that will ensure individuals with disabilities working toward a credential or college degree earn higher wages and meet the demands of tomorrow's labor market. This will be accomplished by an innovative partnership between OOD, Ohio's state college and university system, Ohio Technical Centers and Ohio businesses. These funds will provide access to services such as job placement, technology, and internships that will level the playing field for approximately 1,500 students annually.

Governor DeWine's Executive Order requires all state agencies to increase recruitment, hiring and advancement of people with disabilities. To support this effort, OOD will develop and fund

an internship program for students and adults with disabilities who are on OOD caseloads to assist them in gaining access to state government employment. Approximately 40 paid internship opportunities annually will create a strong recruitment pipeline for permanent employment.

Investment in the Local Business Community

OOD's vocational rehabilitation counselors are required by federal law to serve individuals with disabilities in all 88 counties in Ohio. Only OOD can make eligibility determinations, develop a plan for employment, authorize services, approve payment, and complete case closures. We accomplish this by purchasing a wide range of vocational rehabilitation services from more than 360 service provider partners throughout the state. The increase in the number of individuals with disabilities served through these initiatives will result in more jobs and additional revenue for local providers.

In addition, OOD's Business Relations Team invests in partnerships with more than 400 businesses throughout Ohio to promote the hiring of people with disabilities. Some examples of these partnerships include StarTek, Aultman Hospital, Fifth Third Bank, CVS Health, and Crown Equipment Corporation. OOD's Business Relations Specialists assist employers with recruitment of new employees and provide access to supports for existing staff who need services to keep their jobs. OOD also provides no-cost disability etiquette and awareness training and worksite accessibility technical assistance to employers to strengthen their efforts to be a workplace that supports inclusion and diversity.

We are now entering our third year of a unique partnership with one of Ohio's largest employers, The Ohio State University, which embeds an OOD staff person with the university's human resources staff to identify available openings, and source candidates for those jobs. To date, 44 people with disabilities from OOD caseloads have been hired through this initiative. Since it began, OSU has experienced a 65 percent increase in hiring people with disabilities, a success the university largely attributes to our partnership. A few months ago, OOD and Giant Eagle, Inc. replicated this model to increase hiring at their stores and distribution center in Northeast Ohio. This partnership also provides supports to current team members to keep their jobs. These collaborations are examples of how businesses value the services OOD and our partners provide to help them hire and retain more people with disabilities.

Conclusion

Nearly one in four people will acquire a disability at some point in their lifetime. People with disabilities are our co-workers, customers, friends and family members, and they want the same opportunities as everyone else. They want a chance to demonstrate their abilities, be productive, and add value to their communities. In other words, they don't want to just find a job. They want to find their purpose.

OOD's budget represents a state investment of \$17.4 million in General Revenue Funds in the first year and \$18.9 million in the second (an 8 percent increase in each year). I respectfully ask for your support of the investments that this budget makes in Ohioans with disabilities and your local districts. I would be more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.