

Testimony on House Bill 166
State Biennium Budget
Debra A. Studer
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Chairman Hackett, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today on HB166—the state budget. My name is Debra A. Studer and I am the Regional Director at Interim HealthCare in Eastern Ohio, as well as a resident of Perry County. I come before you today asking for your assistance to increase Medicaid home health rates, which are so low that my agency is seriously considering dropping our Medicaid services altogether.

The low rates have now created critical access issues for some patients and has left many people without the ability to get home care services. In fact, skilled home health rates are the same today as they were in 1998. Today, Medicare rates are three times higher than Medicaid rates leaving many agencies having to make difficult decisions about who is able to receive care. Worst of all, issues with managed care means we may not even be paid at all. Combine this with expensive new regulatory requirements such as EVV and my agency's ability to continue to provide Medicaid services is now in serious jeopardy.

Our organization provides nursing, home health aides and therapies through Home Care and Hospice to Ohio residents throughout Ohio. My operations specifically serve the residents in Perry, Morgan, Muskingum, Licking, Coshocton, Holmes, Tuscarawas, Guernsey, Jefferson and Harrison Counties.

Maintaining a workforce in these areas has become very difficult. We do not have the ability to pay employees \$15.00 per hour and pass the cost on to the consumer like Amazon, Walmart and McDonalds do. Our reimbursement is less than what we can pay our employees and they care for the most vulnerable residents in Ohio. Reimbursement is predominantly government business, which is highly regulated, costly and extremely poor reimbursement. We cannot compete with other health care entities like nursing homes and hospitals, or private sector jobs, yet we provide very critical services to Ohio residents. Serving residents across state lines for Pennsylvania, whose reimbursement is two times what Ohio's is provides even greater challenges. Ohio nurses are licensing in Pennsylvania and Indiana where reimbursement is higher and pay is more appropriate to the education they have received and the needs they require for their families.

Last week I did an exit interview with a HHA who had given her notice to leave home care and hospice for a position at Amazon. She has been with us for many years and has been an excellent caregiver with great compassion for her clients. She cried that she would have to leave her clients and they cried as well to lose her. She shared that she would start at \$16.00 per hour with immediate benefits, including profit sharing. I understand she has no other choice but to make a better life for herself and her family. I also lost one RN and two LPN's in Jefferson County when they received their licensure for the state of Pennsylvania and took positions across the state line for better pay.

We cannot continue to provide Medicaid services if the State of Ohio is not willing to support reimbursement rates that cover the costs of providing care. This is not something that we take lightly, but when Medicare pays three-times more for the same services and the number of Medicare recipients is growing, it is a simple economic decision.

It's for these reasons that I humbly ask for your help with increasing the home health Medicaid rates in this budget. Thank you again for allowing me to testify today. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have at this time. Thank you.