



THE FUSE NETWORK

providing services for HWI, LICCO & MSI

Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid

Testimony on HB 166

5/16/19

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Mary Thompson-Hufford and I am the CEO of The Fuse Network, and we support people with developmental and intellectual disabilities in Coshocton, Licking and Muskingum Counties. We are a not for profit organization that provides supports to more than 400 people each year through day array, transportation, OOD and residential services.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine, Director Davis for the Department of Developmental Disabilities, and Director Miller for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities because it supports our mission of helping people have better lives.

I am testifying before you today to express enormous gratitude on behalf of our seventy-two Direct Support Professionals (DSP), the people that they support, their families, our communities and the leadership and Board of Directors of the Fuse Network. We are so appreciative for the increase for DSP wages.

Back in 2010, when I became the CEO it was really difficult to recruit and retain direct support professionals. Our starting wage was \$8.50 per hour and our highest paid DSP might have earned \$9.50 having several years of experience. It was difficult to maintain stability and provide quality of services when good team members made the choice to leave our team for other jobs that paid more so that they could support their family and themselves and not live in poverty. It was easy to understand but hard to share with the individuals served and families.

Jason Garrett joined our team and his primary role was providing HPC supports to Aaron. They were a wonderful match and loved doing things together. They went to mud truck runs, raw wrestling events, enjoyed going to the gym and so much more. These experiences were exactly what Aaron needed being a young person that had moved out of his father's home. Jason and Aaron's dad Bob worked well together communicating and thinking of creative approaches that

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would support Aaron in having new experiences and a comfort in himself living alone for the first time.

After one year and eight days, Jason made the difficult choice to accept a job outside of services for developmental disabilities. He had plans to propose and marry his girlfriend and wanted to provide for her in ways that he knew he couldn't on DSP pay. Aaron, Bob and I were devastated but wished the best for Jason. Jason continued to visit over the following two years and in 2016, he returned to our organization and continues his service as a DSP today. Jason and Aaron are back together and truly cherish their relationship.

Direct Service Professionals are the most precious resource within the DD system. On a daily basis I am humbled by the work that they do because they give more, believe more and impact more. **The wage increase is one critical component for the stability of the DD system.**

Our team is committed to helping people with more significant barriers gain and retain competitive employment. We appreciate the rate increases as proposed in Direct Miller's budget. The partnership with OOD and DoDD is critical in helping people gain and retain competitive employment. 131 people have accepted employment in Coshocton, Licking and Muskingum as a result of our service delivery since 2017. Some of the people we help obtain jobs don't receive job retention support while others receive transportation support to/from their job. We support more than 100 people with long term job retention and support 191 people with transportation.

Another critical component is non-medical transportation. Sustainable, reliable transportation is critical to people's success. When I first became the director of our program we didn't provide community employment services. My first contract actually had deliverables tied to increasing work availability in the workshop facility. Transportation was to/from the workshop Monday-Friday 9AM to 2:45PM. The proposed funds that support the flexible transportation options that use smaller vehicles to offer a more tailored ride to/from work and community engagement is critical.

Our organization has invested in our quality service delivery creating enormous budgetary pressure because we believe that people with developmental and intellectual disabilities should have lives like yours and mine. People should choose their quality of life and not have it dependent on available staffing or transportation. Please do not delay NMT by creating a new workgroup when our NMT workgroup has already worked for two years in creating a model widely supported by the vast majority of stakeholders in the DD system.

I recognize that our Board of Directors have made strategic decisions to position our organization to be mission driven. The choice to use shared services across three non-profits to reduce administrative cost and over-time, then the recent merger to reduce bureaucracy and duplication of functions all in an efforts to allocate money to services. Our starting wage for DSP is \$12 per hour, On-Site/On-Call pays \$9.50 per hour. We have moved out of the workshop facility in Muskingum County and will be out of the workshop facility in Licking County by July of

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this year. Our organization is committed to doing what's right for people with disabilities. We greatly appreciate the DoDD budget and humbly ask that the Senate Finance Health and Medicaid Subcommittee maintain the allocation to DoDD and OOD.

I would gladly and could easily share more about the amazing DSP's on our team and the difference that they make everyday. I recognize that time is precious. I would like to close with the words of one of our DSP, Joyce Dollings, who was highlighted in the Newark Advocate and Columbus Dispatch on Saturday: Honored to Serve. The links:

<https://www.newarkadvocate.com/story/news/2019/05/11/new-dsp-awards-banquet/1162974001/> and <https://youtu.be/ZvEz3asYFaM>

The DD system is held together by the hard work, passion and commitment of amazing people that serve others everyday. We are so grateful of Governor DeWine's allocation for Developmental Disabilities and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities.

Thank you again, for the opportunity and share with you today. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.

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