

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 Pam Green, and I serve as the president and CEO of Easterseals serving greater Cincinnati. I am here today representing not only my affiliate, but all of the affiliates across the state of Ohio who serve more than twenty thousand citizens with disabilities and disadvantages, including seniors, adults, children and veterans.

I want to first thank you for the investments in this budget that further public health and safety for the individuals we serve by recognizing the worth of our talented direct support professionals. The provision to increase wages to \$13 per hour by 2021 helps address the critical workforce shortage crisis, but I also want to stress the benefit to our state of advancing the economic self-sufficiency of some of the hardest working people I know.

I ask that you reconsider two provisions changed or excluded from the Department of Developmental Disabilities budget. Removing barriers to employment is my agency's stated purpose; transportation is often the most significant barrier. I ask that you strike the language preventing implementation of the funding increase for nonmedical transportation until a new workgroup is formed. The longer we study this issue, the more we constrain the limited transportation resources available. As others have testified, a workgroup of stakeholders from across the system met for two years to discuss the proposed changes. To be clear, my agency was not a member of the workgroup, but workgroup members reached out to solicit our input, which was considerable.

For twenty years, our agency has invested significant capital in a fleet of vans required by the department to transport individuals with disabilities to our day programs. We have fully embraced the State's Employment First initiative, and now, our need for vans is declining—we are transporting fewer groups of 15 people to a center; and more often needing to transport 2-3 people to jobs or volunteer work in their local community.

The proposed rate structure recognized the need to continue to operate more costly multi-passenger vehicles AND incentivize less expensive vehicles to transport individuals or small groups. The current system is built to pay the expense of operating vans and buses, not cars, which are cheaper and so much more practical. Every day, we have to figure out how to stay in business using expensive vans to transport individuals to employment. I believe the proposed rate structure was fair, respected capital investments, and furthered the transformation to community-based services that maximize human potential, community integration, and independence.

Resources to transform our system is the basis for my second request, and I ask that you restore funding to the Department for Innovation Pilots. Ohio ranked second in the nation in the number of people with disabilities served in sheltered workshops before becoming an Employment First state. In the past three years, Easterseals in Cincinnati has closed two sheltered workshops serving more than 300 people. Without the pilot grant we were awarded from the department that provided resources to develop new community-based options, we simply couldn't have done it without significant harm to the families we serve. Even now, as we discuss non-medical transportation, I see where pilot funding could spur innovation in the system. While federal regulations prevent reimbursement to Uber, what if, for example, providers were incentivized to develop regional networks of on-call Medicaid trained drivers? The department must have resources to drive change.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Easterseals' concerns and for your leadership and careful consideration of the challenges House Bill 166 presents.