

**Dear Mr. Chairman and members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid,**

**My name is Nicole Heimbrock and I am a Self-Advocate from Highland County. Today, I represent People First of Ohio and our members with developmental disabilities in support of the budget increase for Direct Support Professionals.**

**I receive services through the Highland County Board of Developmental Disabilities. As a part of my plan for services, I am given choices of providers to help me in what I need to be a part of our community. I have recently chosen IHS services to help me with services in my home. I have had several other providers before choosing them.**

**The Direct Support Staff are very important to me and to my friends throughout Ohio to help us with daily skills that we may need help with. As you may know, transportation is a problem for most of us. Sometimes, our Direct Support Staff are the only way many of our members get to go to the grocery store, or to church, to work, or to visit our friends.**

**But, through the years, we see our staff come and go. Most of the Direct Support Staff are able to receive**

**public assistance because they cannot make enough money working with us. There are hundreds of different disabilities and they are expected to know how to work with each one. Yet, they can go to work at any fast-food place and make more money. Their working hours must be when we need them and it is difficult for them to spend time with their own families because many of them have one or two more jobs, so they can pay their bills.**

**There are not enough Direct Support Professionals in Ohio to meet the basic needs of people with developmental disabilities. It is not because they do not care. It is because people cannot live on what a DSP makes in wages. By providing an increase in this budget, we hope to see more caring people enter this field or to stay in this field, so that we may have the support we need.**

**Thank you for your time and for serving all of us in Ohio.**