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Testimony before the 2019 Finance Subcommittee on Primary and Secondary Education
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Hello. My name is Abby Rampe and I am the Program Manager for Best Buddies Ohio, a state affiliate of Best Buddies International. Founded in 1989, Best Buddies is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide opportunities for one-to-one friendships, leadership development, integrated employment, and inclusive living for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Best Buddies' Ohio office opened in 2016. Currently, we deliver our unique inclusion programs to over 1,100 Ohioans with and without disabilities through Best Buddies chapters in 21 schools throughout the State.

Physical and social barriers inhibit interactions between students with IDD and their typical peers in the classroom or during informal situations such as the cafeteria or at lunchtime. (Hyde, 2002) (Carter et al., 2000) Our time-tested friendship programs create a simple and effective pathway through these barriers, creating opportunities for meaningful social interactions. These increased opportunities have significant short and long-term impacts.

A study done by UNC concluded that adolescents with IDD in one-to-one friendships through Best Buddies show "lower frequencies of peer victimization, better adaptive behavior, higher levels of self-esteem, and fewer psychological symptoms...[Best Buddies' friendships] were similar to friendships with best friends, with additional levels of support, nurturing and 'scaffolding' in skill development." (Prinstein and Aikins, 2005)

Additionally, participants with IDD in Best Buddies have increased social interactions in their school or community, increased involvement in activities with peers, and demonstrate improved social interactions. Participants without IDD become more aware that people with IDD can hold community-based jobs, support having neighbors with IDD, and are willing to work at a company that employs people with and without IDD.

Securing support from the state of Ohio would empower Best Buddies to fill a gap in school and community-based inclusion services offered to Ohioans. We seek an appropriation of \$250,000 each year of the biennium to double the amount of children and adults served through these programs.

Specifically, we seek an appropriation of \$75,000 through the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities to serve adults with IDD through our college and community-based programs and an appropriation of \$175,000 through the Department of Education to serve youth with IDD through our elementary, middle, and high school programs. Overall, these funds would enable Best Buddies to serve 2,200 participants through 42 Best Buddies chapters by the end of the biennium.