



May 24, 2019

Senate Finance Committee

The Honorable Matt Dolan, Chairman

RE: Message in Support of Budget Proposals for Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities

Dear Senator Dolan,

I am Philip Miller, CEO for Portage Industries, Inc. in Portage County and MASCO, Inc. in Mahoning County. Both entities are non-profit corporations that together serve approximately 350 people with developmental disabilities in community employment and day program services and supports. In Portage County, we are post transition to privatized services since June, 2018. In Mahoning County, we are approximately 60% privatized. It is a challenging time of change and adjustment for the people we serve and our organizations’ implementation of service strategies moving into the future.

My perspective is that we need flexibility and multiple options or tools in the tool box to meet the needs and preferences of each individual we serve. Statewide, we sometimes have a tendency to adopt “one size fits all” approaches and mandate services accordingly. I have watched with interest some of the budget process including testimony of self-advocates. Every one of the advocates had specific things they wanted, and it was personal to them. For that reason, I support the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine, Director Davis for the Department of Developmental Disabilities and Director Miller of Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities as approved by the Ohio House of Representatives. As an example, the proposal on non-medical transportation will add flexibility that permits more cost-effective vehicles and eliminates trip limitations. Those two features alone will make it possible for providers to improve personalized access to the things people with disabilities want and need to be a part of their community; very little happens without the critical service transportation provides. Currently, providers like Portage Industries, Inc. and MASCO, Inc. are required to provide opportunities for people we serve to be engaged in their community. However, there is no provision for the transportation to get them to their destination. We thereby operate with an unfunded mandate that can be remedied by a change in transportation rules allowing needed flexibility.

I have heard eloquent testimony about the workforce crisis we are facing today. I add my support for the proposal that will increase wages for Homemaker Personal Care Services.

Our system won’t be able to accomplish this by the end of the current budget planning cycle, but we must update our reimbursement rate formulas to reflect the significant change in how we deliver services. We are serving people in smaller groups so the reimbursement system based on 1/16, 1/12, 1/6 and 1/3 staff to consumer service ratio is no longer relevant. The current acuity determination which is tied to the individual budget for day program must be updated. I hope the next budget cycle will address this need.

Finally, I want to express support for Director Miller’s budget initiatives. Competitive, integrated employment is the ideal vocational outcome. Currently, our two organizations support approximately 60 people in community-based jobs. Community engagement vocationally and non-vocationally is really our future in developmental disability services. But it doesn’t come easily; the support needs of people vary widely and our profession must find innovative and creative ways to make this happen – geared to the specific interests and support needs of each person we serve. We were privileged in April to host Director Miller in our Ravenna operation to talk about support needs and vocational success including strategies yet to be developed as our system moves toward increased community inclusion.

On behalf of our agencies, our staff, and the individuals we support, I encourage the Senate Finance Committee to support the proposed budget provisions relevant to the Department of Developmental Disabilities and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. Together we will succeed.

Respectfully,

Philip E Miller, CEO

Portage Industries, Inc.

MASCO, Inc.