



For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

Budget Testimony
Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services
February 23, 2021

Chairman Roemer, Ranking Member West and Members of the Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services, my name is Gary Tonks. I am the President/CEO of The Arc of Ohio. The Arc of Ohio is our states oldest and largest grassroots organization representing individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

The Arc was instrumental in the creation of not only our County Boards of Developmental Disabilities and the Department of Developmental Disabilities, but many of the not-for-profit providers represented by my fellow panel members. We estimate that there are almost 300,000 Ohioans with developmental disabilities, approximately 100,000 of which are supported by the Department of Developmental Disabilities and our 88 County Boards through local, state and federal funds.

When one assumes that each Ohioan with a developmental disability is a member of a family, it is easy to understand why we say that one in every ten families is affected by developmental disabilities, regardless of race, color, religion or socio-economic conditions. Disability, developmental disabilities specifically, are a normal part of the human experience.

That said, I rise in support of the Governor’s proposed budget for the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities with a request that you consider the following:

1. While we support thousands of Ohioans, thousands more need help. Our families are the largest provider of supports to their loved ones. They do so, for the most part, willingly and with no compensation. They do, however, need to know that when they are unable to provide free natural supports, they can have confidence that the Department of DD will step in with paid supports, i.e. additional Home and Community Based Waivers.
2. We have made significant progress in the last several years to deal with recruitment and the retention of direct support staff, but we are far from over. Staff that directly support individuals with developmental disabilities often live in poverty with no health insurance beyond Medicaid. We must continue our efforts to increase provider rates sufficiently to recruit and retain qualified direct support staff. We urge you to consider a 5% increase in rates specifically for this purpose.
3. People with Developmental Disabilities have labels such as: Down Syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Autism, William’s Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and a host of other labels, some of which recognize the fact that there is not even a recognized label other than how

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Page 2.

The Arc of Ohio Budget Testimony 2/23/2021

one functions in life. They are people first and people are complicated. Our needs don't often fit well within one program or Department of State. We therefore support the budget initiative in regard to Multi-System Youth and will use our vast network in an effort to support these young people and their families.

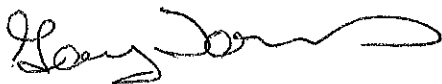
We further support efforts within the Ohio Department of Medicaid to create an Ohio Rise Program which will not only support children within our constituency who have intense needs, but Ohio's children throughout all our human service agencies. I have been asked by Director Corcoran to participate on the Ohio Rise Advisory Group to assist in the initiative's development; and will work to make this program a success.

I joined The Arc almost 47 years ago as a volunteer, in a civil rights movement that has seen dramatic progress. It has been my honor to represent individuals with developmental disabilities and their families in four states watching first hand a transition in services dominated by thousand bed facilities to one which recognizes the dignity and self-determination of all persons regardless of ability. I know that the people on this panel, you, as members of the General Assembly and the Administration want to do what you can for Ohio's most vulnerable citizens.

Thank you for what you have done and what I know you will do to support those who cannot always support themselves.

I'll be happy to answer any questions.

Very sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Tonks", with a long, sweeping horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gary Tonks, President/CEO
The Arc of Ohio