



THE SOCIETY FOR HANDICAPPED CITIZENS
4283 Paradise Road ✦ Seville, OH 44273 ✦ 877.546.8568 or 330.722.1900
Fax: 330.723.6695 ✦ www.shc-medina.org

**Testimony on HB 110
Ohio Senate Finance Committee
May 13th, 2021**

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Chairman Dolan, Vice Chair Gavarone, Ranking Minority Member Sykes and esteemed Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Committee today on HB 110.

My name is Shelly Wharton and I am the Associate Executive Director of The Society for Handicapped Citizens of Medina County, Inc., and we are located in Medina, Ashland and Huron counties and serve individuals who also reside in Wayne, Crawford and Erie counties. We are a non for profit business that provides supports for over 300 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities and we employ approximately 160 staff. We have been in business for 68 years and provide residential intermediate care and waiver (homemaker personal care) services, adult day services, non-medical transportation, summer camp, respite and short term stays and representative payee services. These services provide necessary supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families and natural supports. Without our services individuals will not be able to live their best lives as independently and safely as possible. I write today to encourage the Committee to increasing funding for services administered by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

Throughout the pandemic the workforce emergency has gotten worse. We have shut down services and reopened some at only 30% (constraints from government). During the pandemic our staff stepped up to the plate and swung the bat – they have performed over and above what was imaginable over a year ago. They are dedicated and have worked long hours to ensure the individual we serve are safe and healthy. Due to lack of funding for wages and benefits we have been unable to attract the necessary staff. Some turnover is inevitable, but the rates in our field are astronomical. The Direct Support Professional position is hard. We have many staff who have been with us for over 20 years. They are dedicated to the individuals we serve and the relationships they have built over the years. However, relationships don't pay the bills. We simply do not have new staff coming in or staying. The job market is competitive. We are not.

As such, our current planning includes which service areas will be cut? When will they be cut? What services will remain? And, we are not alone. Many agencies, like us, have stepped up and made sure services were available, even when there is NO reimbursement, because it was the right thing to do. However, our number one priority is the health and safety of the individuals we serve, along with our staff and if we cannot ensure that very tough decisions will be made. It is the individuals we serve and their families who will suffer from these tough decisions and lack of services. The current environment will take us back decades, back to institutional care, back to the developmental centers and there will be no community inclusion that we have strived for and where progress has been made. That is a shame. The lack of support for the individuals we serve is a shame.



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The House's version of HB 110 makes a small investment in day services for Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While any investment in these services is welcomed, I believe there is still more the General Assembly can do to ensure the sustainability and accessibility of services for Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Additional funding for waiver services, specifically for staff wages, will allow us to be competitive with the marketplace to hire the Direct Support Professionals and the infrastructure necessary to support them.

My staff have done amazing and heroic things since the pandemic began, but they are tired, emotionally exhausted and need help. I encourage you to add amendment SC 2290 into the HB 110 to support the following initiatives to best support my staff, my services, and the Ohioans we support:

- Increase general revenue fund appropriations in the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities budget to fund much needed rate increases for homemaker and personal care, day, vocational and employment services, nonmedical transportation, respite services, and shared living under the three Home and Community Based Services waivers administered by DODD.
- Increase general revenue fund appropriations in DODD's budget to support the reimbursement formula for intermediate care facilities (ICF).
 - Allow a temporary change in statute to alter the ICF reimbursement rate calculations for the first year of the biennium.
- Support the creation of a task force to address our system's workforce challenges.

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them! **Thank you again, for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you and if I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.**

Shelly Wharton

Associate Executive Director

swharton@shc-medina.org

330.421.4473