

My name is Alicia Hopkins. I am a disabled advocate, artist and consumer on the My Care Ohio Waiver. I have several medical conditions that qualify me for 56 hours of home care a week to assist with my activities of daily living.

I like to share about the Ohio Caregiver Crisis and the challenges I face because of this crisis and how low wages and pay disparities affect my ability to be independent in my community which is my Olmsted Right. I would like to share some ideas that I think will help us move forward with this caregiver crisis.

The caregiver crisis is in hospitals, nursing homes, developmental centers, group homes and in our very communities. Ohio must invest in a workforce. Ohio needs an Immediate plan to address the caregiver crisis. This is a human rights issue.

I know that a wage increase alone will not fix the systemic problems that drive out our caregivers statewide. I want to be clear that we need funds to incorporate a pay raise and also funds to go towards hiring initiatives, community partnerships and job opportunities for both high school and college students. They are the future of our home care workforce. We must invest in that workforce to have competent home care workers.

Ohio has always been a resourceful state. To keep that same pattern we must allot money towards a better home care system. We have many job centers they often go under utilized let's work with our job centers to become training centers for health care workers. We can partner with the Red Cross and other community agencies to get people trained and equipped for the workplace.

Money could be allotted to Ohio Medicaid to build better presentations and Information to help people become providers. Funds could be used for the previously mentioned partnerships.

Our providers need a pay increase. It crazy to know that when you do find providers many won't take on my case because systems of waivers are played against another. This now going forward must be one Ohio HCBS. We must give a pay raise to our hardworking Medicaid providers, along with aging and developmental disabilities to ensure equal access to all Ohioans with disabilities.

I get tired of hearing providers say, " Oh I can make more as Dodd provider but then leave me hanging as a Medicaid client." Or deal with fact takes months on end to contract with the managed care organizations further delaying care. I just want equal access to care. Enough with these pay disparities and contracting problems We need workers so please make the wages higher and so people can afford to live and function as caregivers. It is sad with cost of living many aides don't make a lot. If we really want to invest in workforce that is independent we will invest in Ohioans who work some of most needed jobs.

Ohio has more people over 60 then in their 20s. The baby boomer generation is aging this will require more care. Just as baby boomers have invested in our economy we must invest in the future of their care as more people are aging by the day. We must invest and make care accessible to all.

In the current state there are thousands of people without the authorized care. That's me. I have 56 hours but I only care find caregivers for about 25-30 hours. My case manager has reached out to around 80 agencies just isn't staffing. It is difficult to find providers in our state out of date provider directory that hold incorrect disconnected phone numbers no one will fix.

Some days I go without a shower or a hot meal or the ability to brush my hair or anyone to empty my bedside commode. There are many limits to my life because of the strain that the caregiver crisis has put on me. I have an over utilized back up plan that is beginning to wear on friendships and social situations.

What makes our caregivers less an Ohioan than others in the workforce? Ohio must invest in our workforce if we are truly are "in this together " as Ohio has preached this motto In the last year. If we are "in this together " then we must be into making things better for all. We need workers and people need care. We also need a stronger workforce so in order to get there; we need a committed financial investment by the state of Ohio. This investment must include conditions that strengthen and support the wage increase such as hiring initiatives, partnerships and training opportunities.

This are piece is a representation of the voices of Ohioans across the state. Ohio caregiver crisis is extreme! We need an immediate action Plan to deal with this crisis in our homes and communities. We look to our leaders to be change makers for the sake of equal access to care and employment for all.

