



Testimony on HB 110
Senate Health Committee
May 4, 2021

Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio and esteemed Members of the Senate Health 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 Bob Gaston, and I am the CEO of ARC Industries, Inc. We are located in Columbus and serve individuals throughout Central Ohio. We are a nonprofit agency that provides supports for 1,800 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and we currently employ 245 full-time staff. For over 50-years we have been providing an array of services which includes vocational training, community employment supports, adult day services, non-medical transportation and HPC (homemaker and personal care services). Individuals we serve rely upon these services to live to the greatest level of independence possible and to ensure their safety. I write today to encourage the Committee to increasing funding for services administered by the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities.

Prior to the pandemic, we employed over 350 full-time staff members. As our day programs were forced to close many staff members made the decision to retire or resign from their positions rather than to take alternative assignments on second and third shifts or weekends. Others elected to leave their positions due to the tremendous stress of being a front-line worker. During the past several months, this reduction in workforce has had a limited ability to provide services given the very limited number of individuals we can serve particularly in our day services programs given the current restrictions that are in place.

As we begin to re-open our day service programs along with the multiple requests for HPC services that we receive each day, this reduction in our workforce brought on by COVID-19 is beginning to have a tremendous impact on our ability to meet service needs. We anticipate the need to hire a minimum of 120 full-time Direct Service Professionals by the end of this calendar year to meet this ongoing demand and to restore our pre-COVID service levels. We are facing tremendous challenges with recruiting candidates. There is an extremely limited pool of qualified candidates that are willing to accept positions that have starting wages and benefits that are significantly lower than any other business or industry in Central Ohio. Sadly, many of our current DSP's are seeking work opportunities outside the field of developmental disabilities due to the low wages and benefits that are a result of the low reimbursement rates paid to providers that have not changed in almost 14-years.

We have a growing waiting list of individuals waiting to return to services which we are unable to staff at this time due to the staffing crisis that is being felt across the State of Ohio. Families are becoming increasingly alarmed and fear their loved ones will not be able to receive services.

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. ARC Industries has a reputation providing outstanding quality, reliable and effective services for individuals with developmental disabilities. This much needed investment in our service system will ensure these services can continue.

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 the following initiatives into Ohio's biennium budget 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).
- Support the creation of a task force to address our system's workforce challenges.
- Allow a temporary change in statute to alter the ICF reimbursement rate calculations for the first year of the biennium.

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.

Sincerely,



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