



THE SOCIETY FOR HANDICAPPED CITIZENS  
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## **Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget House Finance Committee**

March 24th, 2023

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeny, and esteemed committee members,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

My name is Anthony Kirkby and I am the Director of Clinical Operations & Staff Development for The Society for Handicapped Citizens. Personally, I have been supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities for over 20 years. Our agency has been supporting individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities for 70 years! We are the oldest provider agency in our county and currently provide services in four counties throughout Ohio (Ashland, Huron, Medina & Wayne). We are an organization that provides residential care in intermediate care facilities, and home and community-based waiver settings. Additionally, we provide adult day programming, non-medical transportation, and representative payee services. Our team consists of around 144 employees who are proud to provide essential services to approximately 164 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We are so very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck from DODD. That being said, we believe additional funding is necessary to be competitive in the changing labor landscape and critical shortage of direct support professionals (DSP). These shortages threaten our ability to provide the critical supports needed for the individuals we serve. The services that they rely on to be active and valued members of their community.

Due to the current DSP shortage, the lack of reimbursement structure to provide a competitive wage (which we believe to be a \$20.64/hour average), we have been forced to discontinue services and supports for nearly 18 individuals that require them. We have had to close five home and community-based services locations due to the inability to attract staff to this rewarding field without appropriate compensation for the work they are asked to do. We continue to have to turn people away in our communities in need of services, primarily due to the inability to provide the required staff needed to serve.

Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities have unique challenges that require highly trained, compassionate staff willing to put in time, energy and grit to support and encourage a sustainable and meaningful quality of life. These services may be as simple as



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assisting an individual to the grocery store or balancing their checkbook. But services can also be every extreme and require the DSP provide all care for an individual with a team of care givers for tasks such as feeding, bathing, toileting needs, dressing. The very basic things that people need to live happy, productive, and meaningful lives. The very basic things that we take for granted every day.

The Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck, provides a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services that we at The Society provide. We encourage this subcommittee to approve the Governor's budget proposal for DODD and to invest additional dollars into these vital services. Your investment will allow us to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.64, making us a competitive contender in an already strained job market. This investment will help us recruit and retain the workforce needed to continue to provide our quality services.

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.

**Anthony J. Kirkby**

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