

BELCO WORKS, INC.

Accredited by the Commission on the Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities

Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget House Finance Committee

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

I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to you today.

My name is Anne Haning and I am the CEO of Belco Works, Inc. We are located in St. Clairsville, Ohio, serving individuals in 6 counties in eastern Ohio. Belco Works is a not-for-profit business providing day and employment supports through the home and community based waiver program administered by the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), as well as employment and vocational training through Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities. Our team of 65 employees are proud to provide essential services to over 180 Ohioans with disabilities.

I am very supportive of the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for DODD and the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Miller for Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD). The changing labor landscape and accompanying shortage of workers, including direct support professionals (DSP), threatens our ability to provide the critical supports on which our the people we serve and their families rely. The budget proposed in HB 33 is a good foundation to help our system combat these many changes.

Our location in the southeast region of the state is a predominately rural area experiencing many economic and social challenges. These factors add another layer of challenge in serving our citizens with developmental disabilities, who are often disproportionately affected by such economic and social/cultural impacts.

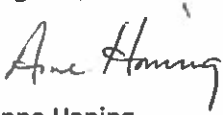
A very competitive labor market has made it extremely challenging to attract qualified applicants to work for little more than minimum wage. The reimbursement rates currently in effect are inadequate and insulting to the profession. In many cases, the individuals with disabilities that we support begin jobs at higher wages than our staff. Many of our job postings for vacant positions receive no interest whatsoever. Our current employees work overtime and juggle multiple assignments to try to fill gaps in services to individuals with disabilities, which only leads to burnout and stress, and often, resignation from jobs.

Individuals and their families feel the impact of this in every way, as they sometimes must struggle to piece together their own schedules to provide for the needs of their family member in the absence of adequate professional supports through the HCBS waiver system. Limited accessibility to services can result in individuals with disabilities having fewer options, less community involvement, and reduced services. Our services are totally dependent upon an adequate, qualified workforce of direct support professionals who can earn a living through providing essential services.

The Governor's proposed budget initiatives, guided by the leadership of Director Hauck and Miller, is a great foundation to reinforce and rebuild the services provided by Belco Works. With these budget initiatives, Ohioans with disabilities will continue to receive the vital day and employment services organizations like mine provide. We encourage this committee to approve the Governor's budget proposal for DODD and ODD and to invest additional dollars through budget amendment HC0656 into these vital services to raise direct support professional wages to at least an average of \$20.64.

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 share my concerns with you.

Regards,



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