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Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget

House Finance Committee

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

I want to thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony.

My name is Richard Grossberg, M.D. and I serve as Medical Director at the Hattie Larlham Center for Children with Disabilities.

I know that you are already aware that over the past several years the developmental disability (DD) provider community in Ohio has been significantly challenged by staffing and funding issues. **We are in a crisis.** We have a unique opportunity through the current state budget process to provide much needed additional funding to the DD provider network to address the current needs. We need your help.

I have served as the Medical Director of Hattie Larlham since 1999. I have also been the director of the Rainbow Center for Comprehensive Care, which is affiliated with Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital, since 2011. I am boarded in general pediatrics and neurodevelopmental disabilities and am a full professor of pediatrics through Case Western Reserve University School of Medicine. My entire career has been dedicated to children and young adults with neurodevelopmental disorders, many of whom reside in facilities like Hattie Larlham.

I currently serve as a member of the Board of Directors for the Hattie Larlham Center for Children with Disabilities and am a founding and ex officio board member of the Pediatric Complex Care Association, a membership organization that represents 45 pediatric and young adult long-term care facilities across our country.

Hattie Larlham, a not-for-profit organization, is one of the largest providers of services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Ohio. Hattie Larlham provides services to over 1,500 individuals at approximately seventy (70) locations in Northeast Ohio and the Franklin County area and have over eight hundred employees.

Hattie Larlham's flagship location is the Hattie Larlham Center for Children with Disabilities in Mantua, Ohio (Portage County). The Center is an Intermediate Care Facility (ICF) and is home to 121 residents, who in addition to their intellectual or developmental disabilities, also have complex medical issues.

As a physician caring for these residents for 24 years, I have seen firsthand the impact of the staffing shortage on the quality of life for those we serve with significant disability. Critical to caring for such a fragile population is a workforce that is not only sufficient in number but is adequately compensated for such challenging work. A fair wage will then allow our employees to remain committed to their work over

our resident's lifespan. Consistency of care is so critical for our residents. Our employees are often like family to many of the residents, particularly those that may lack family involvement.

At present we have over forty (40) individuals on a waiting list for residential placement in one of our Intermediate care facilities, supported living or waiver homes. Given the current staffing crisis we are unable to meet those needs. We are currently not accepting new residents at the Center.

The backbone of any DD provider are its employees. Hattie Larlham relies on DSPs, Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, Respiratory Therapists, and other staff to meet the complex needs of the people we serve. Hattie Larlham will not be able to continue to provide the support and care for the individuals we currently serve unless we are able to address our staffing needs.

It should be obvious that starting salaries of \$14.00 per hour to \$16.00 per hour is not enough to attract employees to consider working as a DSP. We need the help and assistance of the Ohio Legislature to address this staffing crisis and to provide additional funding to allow DD providers to pay its DSPs and other employees an acceptable hourly rate.

We thank you and your colleagues, the Governor, and the leadership at DODD for your efforts and support over the past three (3) years to help us and our colleagues deal with the COVID-19 pandemic and the staffing crisis. I know that Governor DeWine has included additional funding for DD providers in the FY 2024-2025 state budget. This increase is an important start to help Hattie Larlham and other providers address their staffing needs but is it not the full funding solution that is needed and more needs to be done.

We believe that starting salaries for DSPs need to be at a minimum of \$20 per hour. Without additional funding providers in Ohio will be forced to close, limit programs or services even more than what has already occurred, or significantly reduce the size of their operations. If we do not fix this funding issue now – who will?

Thank you for your support of Ohioans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We look forward to a state budget that will provide the needed funding to stabilize the DD system and allow us to meet the needs of the people we serve. They count on us every day for their needs – and we cannot let them down.

A society should be judged by how well it takes care of its' least vulnerable. Our State should then act accordingly to protect those residents who are most vulnerable and fragile and in our care.



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