



koinonia

Testimony on SFY 24/25 Operating Budget House Finance Committee

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

My name is Stacey Rokoff, and I am the Vice President of Programs of Koinonia Homes, and we are located in Cuyahoga County. Koinonia Homes is a nonprofit organization that provides whole person, community based, care to IDD (intellectual and developmental disabilities) individuals. Koinonia has a wide-reaching presence throughout northeast Ohio. We operate over 60 homes throughout the region, allowing the individuals we serve to continue to reside in and be contributing members of the communities they know as home. This model of care is utilized throughout the state of Ohio, and it is a more sustainable and economical alternative to other methods of long-term care. This model has allowed IDD Ohioans to live longer and healthier lives. Our team of over 400 employees are proud to provide essential services to over 300 Ohioans with intellectual and developmental 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 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.

I have spent my entire career advocating for underserved populations. I am committed to ensuring everyone has a chance to live a quality and healthy life. As an organization, we are doing everything we can to give the individuals we serve the best possible quality of life. However, our organization is almost exclusively funded with Medicaid dollars, and the reimbursement rate we currently receive is not sustainable. While our industry faced funding challenges prior to COVID-19, the pandemic exacerbated them. We have been challenged with consolidating homes and staff shortage since COVID-19 began in 2020. Koinonia has been around for 47 years and is an anchor institution in Northeast Ohio. We need the resources to do better and perform the highest level of service possible.

Our organization is led by innovative professionals, who have found every creative way to sustain quality services. Throughout the pandemic, we have passionate and empathetic direct service providers, who provide essential care, companionship, and daily support to our individuals. The families of the individuals we serve depend on our services. Everyone who chooses to do this work truly cares about the people we serve, which causes us to have high goals and expectations for ourselves. However, innovation and creative solutions can only go so far, action by the General Assembly is needed for our long-term success.

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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 Koinonia Homes. With these budget initiatives, Ohioans with disabilities will continue to receive the vital employment services organizations like mine provide. We encourage this committee to approve the Governor's budget proposal for DODD 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 an hour.

With your leadership, together we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them!

Thank you for the opportunity and privilege to bring my concerns before you today.

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