



Testimony on SFY 24/25

House Finance Committee

Carol L. Slight

March 30, 2023

Operating Budget

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeny and esteemed Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing me opportunity to provide written testimony to you today.

My name is Carol Slight, and I serve as the Vice President of the Filling Memorial Home of Mercy in Napoleon. I have been employed with Filling for 32 years. Working as a DSP was my first job at age 16, and I have continued to work in this field for all but 2 years of my career.

Filling Home was built 64 years ago with the generous donation of Carrie Filling Vajen and her family's estate. We have been and remain a faith-based organization with roots in the Lutheran Church.

Today, Filling Homes serves 147 individuals within ICFs, community waiver homes and day programs in the 4 counties of Northwest Ohio.

The majority of residents we serve in the ICF are medically complex and very physically involved needing total assistance. As a faith-based organization, I believe our DSPs are the hands and feet of God. They are the unsung heroes who provide the hands-on care of the residents. Yes, it's very rewarding work, but it is also very physically demanding work to care for adults needing total care. Then to work short staffed makes it very emotionally draining as well. One of our core values states that we strive for excellence. While that remains true, I believe it to be more accurate, under the current circumstances, that we are really just striving to make sure everyone is provided essential care. Today, we are striving to survive, and it's alarming.

We need stability in our workforce. Our residents need stability in our workforce. They deserve it. Never in my career have I faced such challenging times. Our organization currently has 63 open positions, our turnover rate is 45%, yet, we have raised our wages 36% in the past 3 years, and it hasn't been enough. I would have thought it would be enough, but it hasn't. The staff we have been fortunate to keep, they're tired, their burned out. You'll meet Kasey in a minute to hear her story.

Focusing only on our ICF program, we have 13 beds vacant beds right now. We have not been admitting new residents due to critical staffing levels. In our large ICF, we have 10 open beds—just to give you a snapshot of our schedule today—we should have 30 DSPs on our payroll to work 2nd shift to provide the 24-hour, 7 day per week care. We have 14 names on the schedule. We have 14 employees—that's not enough. So, what do we do? We beg, we plead, we offer every initiative we can think of to incentivize picking up shifts. As an administrator, I don't know how long our budget can sustain these measures.



Support people with intellectual and disabilities, enriching lives full of choice within their community.

Yet, my goal is to fill those 13 open beds. We have more than 20 individuals waiting for admission for those beds, and they each have a story of need just like the ones that have been shared throughout this testimony. They ALL break your heart.

Take for example a little girl, who is 8 ½ years old and lives with her adoptive parents. She came to Filling Homes at the age 3 months, after a near death experience at the hands of an abusive family member. Filling Homes' retiring physical therapist stepped forward to foster this little girl. Recently, however, her adoptive mother became the one in need. After suffering a stroke and requiring care herself, her mother applied to Filling Homes for admission. She wants her daughter to return to where she will receive the kind of quality and trustworthy care that she herself provided when she was well. She has since applied to providers across the state and hours away just to find a place that can accept her.

There is a man in his late 50's with profound physical disabilities and an acute seizure disorder. His father, and primary caregiver, is 87 years old. He himself has recently found it necessary to seek 24/7 care at a nursing home. His family is in desperate need of someone to take on care now that his father can no longer do it. Their rejected appeal to Filling Homes is heartbreaking.

Finally, I'd like to tell you of a 3-year-old boy, who has a rare syndrome which requires intensive medical care. He has intellectual and physical disabilities as well as a tracheotomy for breathing assistance and a gastrostomy tube for nutrition. He currently lives in a facility in Shelbyville, Indiana. His mother, who lives in Ohio, only sees her baby boy infrequently, because the facility is a 4-hour drive from their home. His mother really wants her son to live with Filling Homes where she believes the care will be exceptional and the distance will only be a 1 ½ hour drive.

I could tell you 12 more stories of people just like these, who are in crisis and needing the help. The help (and beds) we COULD provide, if we had the staffing to ensure their care. It is our desperate wish to serve more of these people who need us and to ensure that those already in our care are healthy and safe. I just don't believe the budget's current increase will get us there. We need you. We need your help.

Filling Homes' reputation for outstanding service to individuals with disabilities has been built on decades of quality care provided by our DSPs—some in our employment have been in their position for 30 or more years! We owe a debt of gratitude to them and an honest fight to continue our mission on behalf of our founder. We look forward to providing help for some of the most vulnerable citizens of our state, who need it the most. We know that you want that too, because Governor DeWine has already proven it by what he done for this field. I'm happy today to stand beside one of our dedicated Direct Support Professionals, Kasey Binning, and support her right to share her experience and lend her voice to the discussion because of the direct impact it has on her life.

On behalf of the other 303 employees at Filling Homes, we ask for the budget increases that invest in the stabilization of our direct care workforce, so we can continue our mission as it was intended and to allow us to prepare for a vibrant future of serving people in need.



Rooted in faith, we support people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, enriching lives full of value, hope, and choice within their community.