

WITNESS INFORMATION FORM

Please complete the Witness Information Form before testifying:

Date: 3/28/2023

Name: Lass Kenneh

Are you representing: Yourself Organization

Organization (If Applicable): Independence of Portage County, Inc.

Position/Title: Day Program Manager

Address: 575 E. Lake St.

City: Ravenna State: OH Zip: 44266

Best Contact Telephone: 330-296-2851 Email: lkanneh@iopci.org

Do you wish to be added to the committee notice email distribution list? Yes No

Business before the committee

Legislation (Bill/Resolution Number): HB 33

Specific Issue: Department of Developmental Disabilities and Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Budget

Are you testifying as a: Proponent Opponent Interested Party

Will you have a written statement, visual aids, or other material to distribute? Yes No

(If yes, please send an electronic version of the documents, if possible, to the Chair's office prior to committee. You may also submit hard copies to the Chair's staff prior to committee.)

How much time will your testimony require? Written testimony only

Please provide a brief statement on your position: I support the budget initiatives outlined by DODD and OOD and encourage the sub-committee to include additional investments for these important services.

Please be advised that this form and any materials (written or otherwise) submitted or presented to this committee are records that may be requested by the public and may be published online.



INDEPENDENCE

OF PORTAGE COUNTY

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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 testify before you today.

My name is Lass Kanneh and I am the P.E.A.C.E. Day Program Manager of Independence, Inc., and we are located in Portage, Summit and Stark counties. We are a nonprofit organization providing Intermediate Care Facilities (ICF); Adult Day Services (ADA); residential support and employment opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities in Ravenna, Ohio through the home and community-based waiver program administered by the Department of Development Disabilities (DODD). Our team of 150 employees are proud to provide essential services to 80 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.

Our diverse team of well-trained and dedicated Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) is vital to providing essential services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Being an African immigrant and DSP, I can assure you that DSP's are an integral part of the DD community; however, our workforce in post-pandemic is experiencing a grave crisis impacted by low wages, shortage of staff, ongoing stress and exhaustion. Therefore, I greatly support the budget initiatives outlined by Governor DeWine and Director Hauck for the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD).

The supportive services we DSP's provide to individuals in the DD community are critically important for their personal well-being, skills development and community inclusion, as well as reducing emotional stress for their families. Ensuring adequate funding for our industry will strengthen its effort to remain competitive by recruiting and retaining people needed to support our DD community across Ohio. Such funding will also increase wages and appropriate benefits for us (DSP's) to cover our living expenses, including health and childcare. Our individuals matter! We DSP's matter! We need our county and state leadership to support the importance of our industry by providing adequate funding to empower DSP's to stay focused on delivering quality services to our DD community.

Making a Difference Together

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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 Independence, Inc. 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 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.**

This investment will help Independence of Portage County, Inc. to recruit, retain and provide support to the workforce needed to continue providing quality services to our individuals with developmental disabilities. Together with your leadership, we can ensure these services are available to the Ohioans that so greatly need them!

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 today,** and if I can ever be of any help in this process, please let me know.

Lass Kenneh
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Paths to Enrichment, Activity, Creativity and Enterprise (P.E.A.C.E.)
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